

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation **Three Unitary Authorities** Proposal

Appendices





Contents

A	Appendix A: Development of Boundary Proposals	3
B	Appendix B: Options Appraisal Further Detail	9
	B.1 Single Unitary Option	9
	B.2 Two Unitary Option	14
	B.3 Three Unitary authorities Option (3UA)	19
C	Appendix C: Volterra Oxfordshire LGR Economic Growth Report	27
D	Appendix D: Engagement Detail	77
	D.1 Key findings from our surveys:	80
E	Appendix E: Council Tax and Harmonisation	99
	E.1 Council Tax	99
	E.2 Special Expenses	99
	E.3 Council Tax Harmonisation	100
	E.3.1 Harmonising to the Highest Band D with a 4.99% increase	101
	E.3.2 Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase	102
	E.4 Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase	106
	E.5 Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D	107
F	Appendix F: Oxfordshire Waste & Environmental Services Transformation Programme (WESP)	113

G

Appendix G:		
Detailed Target Operating Model Blueprints		121
G.1	Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P)	121
	G.1.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford	121
	G.1.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire	122
	G.1.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway	122
	G.1.4 Recommended Approach	123
	G.1.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation	125
G.2	Adult Social Care	126
	G.2.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford	126
	G.2.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire	126
	G.2.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway	127
	G.2.4 Recommended Approach	127
	G.2.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation	128
G.3	Children's Services	129
	G.3.1 Context and constraints: Greater Oxford	129
	G.3.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire	130
	G.3.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway	130
	G.3.4 Recommended Approach	131
	G.3.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking innovation	132
G.4	SEND and Education	133
	G.4.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford	133
	G.4.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire	134
	G.4.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway	134
	G.4.4 Recommended Approach	135
	G.4.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation	136
G.5	Enabling Services	136
	G.5.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford	136
	G.5.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire	137
	G.5.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway	138
	G.5.4 Recommended Approach	139

H

Appendix H:	
Implementation RAID Log	141

I

Appendix I:	
Case for Cities Report 2025	145
produced by Inner Circle Consulting	



Appendix A: Development of Boundary Proposals

Our proposal is for three unitary councils (3UA) covering the current Oxfordshire geography and extending to include West Berkshire. This lay-down of boundaries enables three viable unitaries, close to the people they serve, and each with a distinctive identity and profile for future generations.

1. Greater Oxford Council, based on the city and its Green Belt
2. Northern Oxfordshire Council merging West Oxfordshire and most of Cherwell
3. Ridgeway Council bringing together most of Vale of Whitehorse and South Oxfordshire with West Berkshire

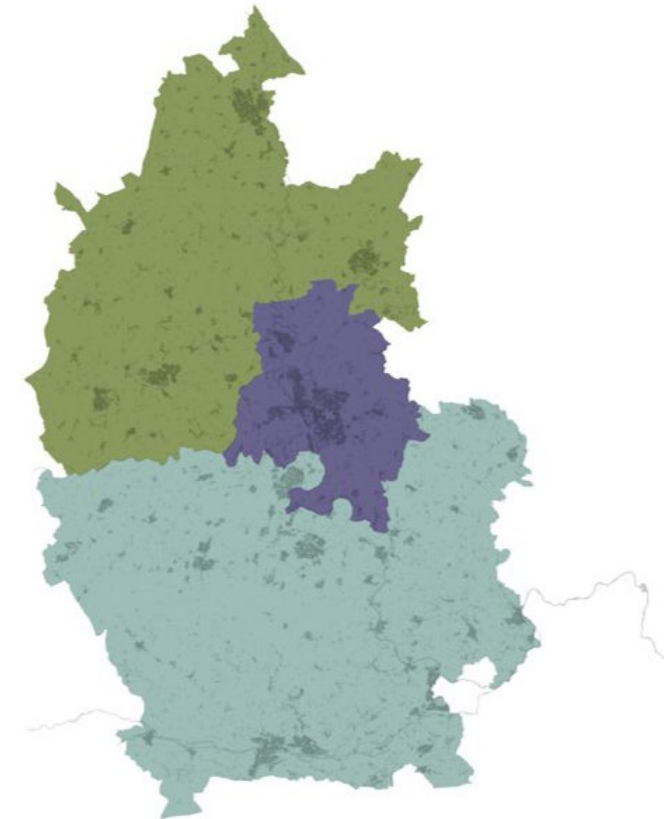


Fig A.1: Boundary proposal for a three unitary option with expanded boundaries for Greater Oxford

Early iterations of the boundary options included a self-governing city area surrounded by a single unitary authority for the rest of Oxfordshire. This option was discounted in light of the aspiration of the southern districts and West Berkshire for cross-boundary unitarisation. This significantly altered the population and financial calculations, both for a doughnut option and for a potential to create three unitary authorities.

The inclusion of West Berkshire to extend the boundaries of the overall geography fits the legislative framework as a Type C proposal: a single tier that includes adjoining areas.

Greater Oxford

Oxford has been self-governing for centuries, and the starting premise for this proposal was that the city continues to need to its own governance for its own unique circumstances. The city's international renown, its ability to attract investment and its growing innovation economy present both challenges and aspirations among its residents and businesses that are not shared by the surrounding areas.

Oxford's young, diverse, highly qualified and very mobile population cites the lack of access to affordable housing as a key issue and identifies directly with the opportunities brought through growth. The Oxford2050 Vision¹ – produced with the input of the city's residents and businesses

– set an aspiration that “Oxford's population will continue to grow over the next thirty years as people are drawn to live, work and study in our attractive, vibrant and thriving city.” A recurring theme of the vision is the desire for more affordable housing, homes near jobs, and protection for renters.

But Oxford's pro-growth outlook is not shared in many other parts of the county. An inbuilt rural majority has generally prioritised conservation over growth. For decades the democratic will of this rural majority has led to the return of councils across Oxfordshire's other districts and at the county level that have sought to minimise the amount of growth planned, or delivered.

Government has made clear that growth is its number one mission. Yet, either of the one unitary (1UA) or two unitary proposals (2UA) would create an anti-growth majority electorate within any of these councils. The democratic will of those populations is likely to lock in a status quo and stymie any real dash for growth in Oxfordshire. The creation of Greater Oxford establishes an area, unique in economic potential, that is likely to see continued pro-growth majority, and support for an acceleration of housing delivery and the creation of skilled jobs

Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire brings together most of Cherwell District Council with West Oxfordshire,

¹ <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/oxfords-future/oxford2050>

to form a single unitary with a clear identity and priorities. This is an area with a good financial foundation and strong opportunities for future growth. There is good alignment both politically and in the priorities of residents, and good co-operation within existing partnership working on which to build. We have listened to West Oxfordshire and Cherwell concerns about their economic viability without the city, but detailed work with Pixel Financial provides us with confidence that this unitary is financially viable from day 1, with strong opportunities for future growth.

Our proposals recognise the opportunities for economic and housing growth in these areas, with the economies of Bicester and Banbury demonstrating strong growth, and significant plans for new housing including at Heyford Park. Oxford's economic agglomeration will see the city's economy grow faster and further than other proposals forecast, creating further opportunities in both the supply chain and the foundational economy. Our modelling demonstrates that concerns about economic viability, while understandable on the existing basis, can be answered by the pro-growth approaches of unitarised Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire.

Ridgeway

Early in the process of developing options, the councils of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse opened discussions about the

creation of a single Ridgeway unitary council. As a proactive move by these councils, which until the 1970s had been largely a unified area, this was included positively in our considerations.

The inclusion of West Berkshire in the total geography gives a current-day population of approximately 0.9million, providing a base for three financially viable authorities. Although West Berkshire has previously sought Exceptional Financial Support, its inclusion with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse in a Ridgeway Council mitigates the risk of future financial failure.

The creation of Ridgeway reflects a historic sense of place for the population of the area, and as a largely rural area with similar demographics across the piece there are shared issues and opportunities for service delivery and future growth. The incorporation of an existing unitary with associated services and structures reduces the disaggregation challenges of creating three unitary councils, further mitigated by our proposal for shared services in areas where scale is important, such as NHS commissioning and Public Health provision.

Boundary development process

In the early stages there were a number of options for the division of Oxfordshire that retained a self-governing city region. The remainder of the county could be retained as a single 'doughnut' unitary, with a separate Greater Oxford at its heart, or the area

could be divided into two smaller unitary authorities. The proactive work between West Berkshire, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire to open discussions to join as a single unitary created an opportunity for to explore the viability of a three-way split. On this basis, we commissioned 5th Studio, specialists in urban design, infrastructure, landscape and architecture, to develop a number of approaches to designing suitable boundaries that enable a self-governing, city-based unitary alongside other unitary arrangements for the rest of the geography.

Early mapping highlighted the topography and major settlements that dictate development and shapes how lives are lived. Alongside this, current and future economic and housing growth had to be considered.

In discussions with stakeholders in transport, business and science, there was a particular interest a single authority based around the knowledge spine (3a and 4a below). This would create one authority across the rapid growth areas of the local economy, creating a focus on economic development. However, from the perspective of statutory service delivery, this approach harmed the viability of services in the remaining areas, and removed important places of employment, education and care. The role of the Mayoral Strategic Assembly (MSA) to deliver strategic planning, transport, skills, and inward investment addresses key issues of co-ordination across the wider region. Considering the Government criteria on efficiencies and better services across the whole geography, alongside the powers of the new MSA, this option was discounted.

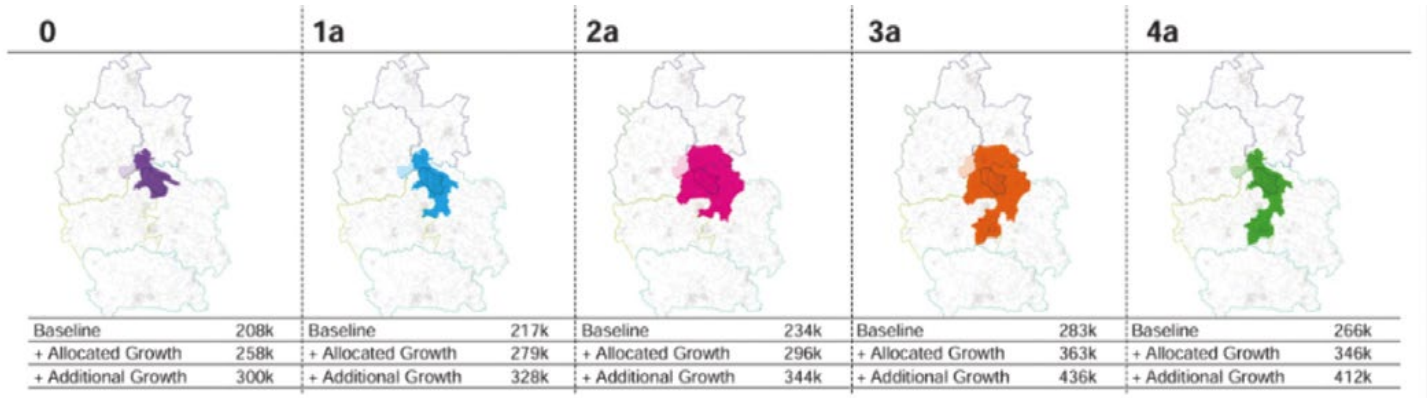


Fig A.2: *Samples of geographies developed by 5th Studio*

Alternative options included a city extended around the designated sites that will provide for Oxford's current unmet housing need, which created limited opportunities for the city and failed to provide for long-term strategic development. Variations of the Green Belt options including Abingdon and/or the science areas around Harwell were discounted as unbalanced for the remaining areas in terms of the identity, economy and urban centres.

The logic of the Green Belt is compelling. This area was created in the 1970s directly in relation to the city, and is well understood by residents, who regard it as the green lungs of Oxford. The boundary is already clearly established and can be mapped closely to existing parish boundaries. The majority of places within the Green Belt look to the city for work, leisure and services, and feel the influence of issues and decisions in the city. Importantly, this option enables agglomeration around Oxford, while also ensuring the Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway councils have strong centres of innovation and growth to meet the financial viability criteria.

The 3UA boundaries were arrived at after detailed exploration of the options, including populations, economic and financial viability and a sense of place. The proposed boundaries create room for growth and drivers for prosperity for all three unitary authorities. They also facilitate strategically managed expansion of business and housing close to the city. Local cohesion and shared identities are also important. The boundaries recognise the

different drivers for local decision-making, from settlement patterns to local demographics, and create places with a shared sense of identity and priorities. Mapping has also been conducted for new wards in the Greater Oxford area to ensure parity of representation in this model.

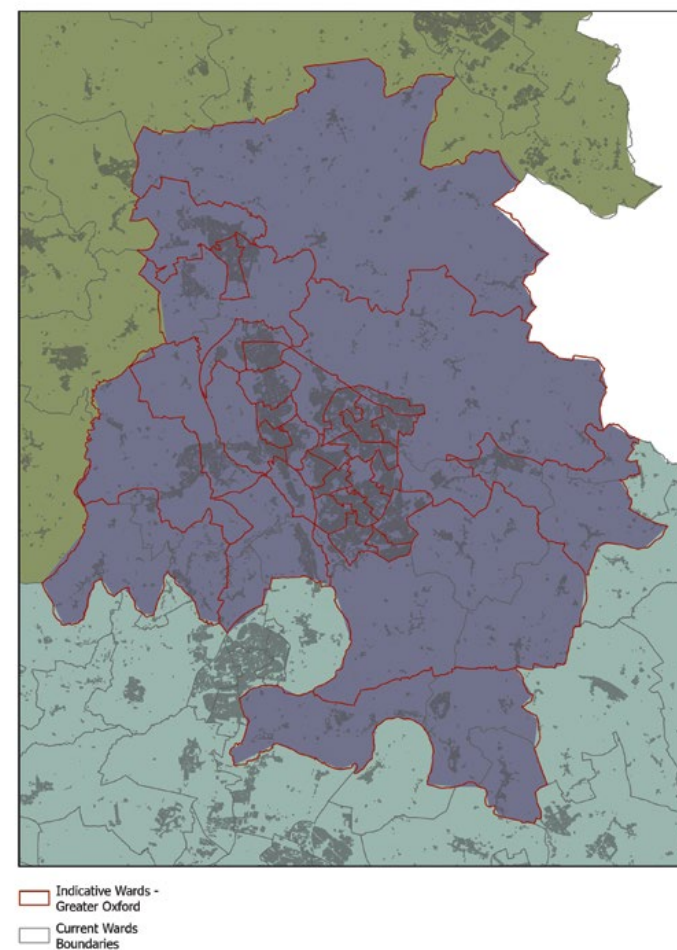


Fig A.3: Greater Oxford wards

The proposal for a Green Belt-based boundary for Greater Oxford requires three local authority boundary changes around the city. In line with Government guidance, parish councils have been used as the building blocks for these changes. Where parishes straddle the boundary, an in-out decision has been made largely on the basis of settlement

patterns. Parishes that sit in the natural expansion space for Abingdon (Ridgeway) have been included in the Ridgeway geography. Eynsham is included in Northern Oxfordshire as an area with direct links to Witney (Northern Oxfordshire), and recognising that the topography would leave it untouched by Greater Oxford’s strategic Green Belt release.

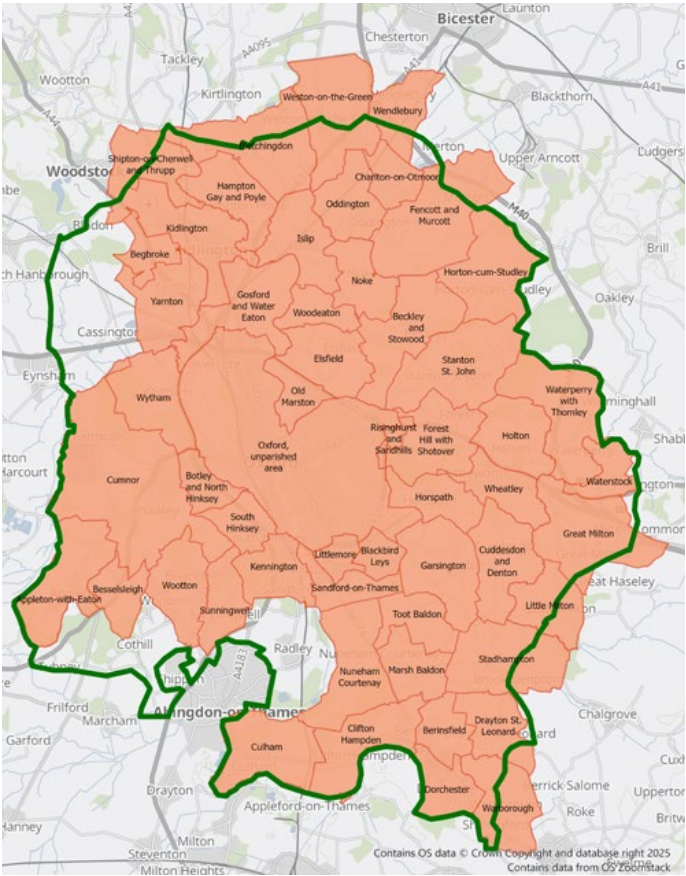


Fig A.4: *Parish councils within Greater Oxford*

The final proposal on boundaries has been thoroughly tested to ensure sufficient population, financial robustness, and a sense of local identity. The administrative boundaries use recognised building blocks as set out in Government criteria, and where possible existing administrative boundaries have been conserved. The proposed geography has also been part of the ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including public engagement across the entire area, discussions with statutory partners covering the area, and engagement with key delivery partners. This division of the area recognises historic identities and future needs, it provides local government that is rooted in place and financially stable, and ensures every unitary can deliver homes, prosperity and quality of life for the people they serve.

Appendix B: Options Appraisal Further Detail

This appendix follows from section 3 in the main proposal and provides a more detailed rationale for our scoring of each of the LGR options against the Government criteria. We set out our scoring for each option and the factors which have informed that score in the table below.

² ONS 2024, <https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/population/current-population/>

We have scored each of the options using the six Government criteria which has been published and shared with all councils.

We have used a 0-3 scale. 0 represents an option which does not meet Government criteria at all. 3 represents a complete match.

B.1 Single Unitary Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/) advantaged areas	1	<p>This option would create a single unitary covering a diverse area of over 1,000 square miles and a total population of around 763,200². This would be of a larger population size than any current single unitary authority in England other than Birmingham and Leeds – both relatively homogeneous urban areas – and far larger than recently created countywide unitary authorities such as Somerset or North Yorkshire. By 2040 Oxfordshire's population is expected to be approaching 1 million, very significantly above the guidelines set by Government.</p> <p>While this would create a single tier of local government, it would need to cover a highly diverse region with significant variations in demographics and priorities. There is now well over a decade of evidence that it is not a sensible geography for improving housing supply. The 2018 commitment to develop a Oxfordshire 2050 Spatial Plan foundered over a failure to agree where new housing should go. Since then, the gap between most Oxfordshire Local Plan housing allocations and what is needed to support the county's fast-growing economy has widened. Emerging Local Plans in three district areas – South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Cherwell fall well short of the minimum requirements set by Government.</p> <p>Many areas of the county face challenges around housing, however these are largely caused by the demand for housing within Oxford, which drives prices and demand across the wider county. Without significant interventions to address Oxford's housing crisis the existing situation with large gaps</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		<p>between advantaged and disadvantaged communities in Oxfordshire is likely to remain. Oxford is the least affordable city for housing in the UK, with average house prices 13.6 times the national wage, and average rents are 68% of the average wage in the city.</p> <p>However, the 1UA proposal doesn't address how new Standard Method levels of housing delivery will be achieved. There is no reference to release of Green Belt land for development, though this would be needed to enable the county's economic engine, Oxford, to grow and deliver agglomeration benefits. The inference that the Mayoral Strategic Authority can move the dial is not correct. It will be for an Oxfordshire Local Planning Authority and its Local Plan, not the Spatial Development Strategy, to allocate land. Notably, Oxfordshire County Council didn't object to the joint South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2041 which delivers less than Standard Method but did object to the proposed Oxford City Local Plan 2040, which would have delivered more than the Government target.</p> <p>Oxfordshire County Council's 2016 structure plan³ constrained Oxford and promoted growth in surrounding towns. Even if a new single unitary authority's policy position shifted in favour of Green Belt release, under National Planning Policy Framework guidelines it would struggle to allocate Green Belt land with so much land available beyond the Green Belt, well away from Oxford.</p> <p>The 1UA proposal is also silent on economic growth, with no ambitions set out for jobs growth across the county. This is despite Oxford and Oxfordshire being identified by Government as key areas to accelerate growth, with both the Oxford Cambridge Growth Corridor and Oxford Growth Commission set up to achieve that outcome. Without Green Belt release, which would be hampered by the 1UA geography, Volterra's analysis shows Oxfordshire's employment growth is likely to be stuck at around the current 1.0%pa.</p> <p>A single unitary authority covering a population of c750k rising to towards 1 million, would find it hard to develop and deliver strategies that could meet the diverse priorities and demands of such a varied area. Oxford is the fifth most densely populated urban area in the South East of England which shares more in common with other UK city regions than is geographical neighbours – such as West Oxfordshire, the second densely populated area in the South East of England.</p> <p>Demographic differences are also very significant: Oxford is much younger, with fewer old people, but also fewer families with children and a much higher ethnic minority population than neighbouring areas. This creates very different needs in different areas of the county geography and a one size fits all approach risks exacerbating the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged areas.</p>

³ <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/Data/County%20Council/20030617/Agenda/CC170603-structureplan.doc>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2	<p>A single unitary would have a council tax base of 347,536 and an estimated total annual expenditure of £906.6m. The short-term financial benefits of economies of scale across management structures and contracts are highest for a single unitary authority. However, economies of scale alone would not sufficiently address the cost of demands in the future.</p> <p>Fundamental public service reform is required to develop a more preventative and responsive service which is tailored to local needs. This will better manage demand and reduce the cost of service delivery. A single unitary is much less well placed to do this across such a large geographical area, different demographics and the different approaches required to delivering services to rural and urban areas. The size of the organisation required would also likely make the single authority less agile in its ability to deliver transformational change.</p> <p>With 1UA creating a local authority second only in size to Birmingham by 2040, there are significant future risks around diseconomies of scale. As evidenced in the 2014 Locality/Vanguard report⁴, diseconomies of scale in the public sector occur often due to challenges with communication, coordination, and management. This leads to inefficiencies like bureaucratic slowdowns, difficulty in innovating, and a decline in staff motivation, ultimately increasing the cost of delivering services instead of decreasing it.</p> <p>Additionally, a single unitary authority would consolidate all financial risks into a potential single point of failure. Should financial demands or shocks arise, which cause risks to the authority, this would have an impact across a far larger area.</p>
Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	1	<p>A move to a single unitary would mean that vital statutory services such as Adult and Children's Social Care would face the least disruption, as they are currently provided by the existing County authority. However, LGR presents a key opportunity to reconsider and restructure public service delivery to ensure that it is high quality and sustainable for the future.</p> <p>Driving real change relies on a deep understanding of local communities at a place-based level, an ability to deliver transformation of services in an agile and rapid fashion and a flexibility to tailor services and partnerships around the needs of specific areas. The differences across Oxfordshire in terms of demographics and geographies would make a single unitary less able to develop tailored services which meet specific local needs and therefore manage demand, due to the diversity of local communities.</p>

⁴ <https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/Locality-Report-Diseconomies-updated-single-pages-Jan-2017.pdf>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		The relatively harder task of disaggregating services to a larger number of unitary authorities would result in services which can better respond to the priorities and demands of specific localities. A single unitary would be least well placed to meet this criterion as the broad reach and size of the organisation would mean it is furthest removed from the communities and places it serves and can therefore be less able to respond to specific needs. This would result in weaker services which would be less able to address demand and mean that efficiencies at Day 1 are at risk of being lost in longer term demand for services due to worse outcomes.
Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	1	<p>As outlined in earlier criteria, a single unitary council would span a very large geographical area, and a population larger than almost any other unitary authority in the country. Travel from the north to south of the county (for example from Banbury to Henley-on-Thames) takes over an hour by car and one hour 45 minutes by public transport. This relative distance make it harder for councillors and staff to travel across a single unitary, which will be necessary to build relationships and collaborate in person.</p> <p>Oxfordshire contains distinct identities, and this has been reflected in engagement across the county in the development of all three LGR proposals. The 1UA proposal itself notes <i>'Community identity is mixed – as is usual in areas with a mix of urban and rural geography people are more likely to identify with the town or village within which (or near which) they live than they are with "Oxfordshire" as a place.'</i></p> <p>A single unitary would dilute the wide variety of local identities across Oxfordshire and therefore the voice and varied priorities of its communities. This risks creating a perceived democratic deficit in which decisions are seen to be imposed from on particular areas by decision-makers from outside those areas, despite clear local opposition. A recent example of this is the introduction of a Congestion Charge in Oxford, opposed by 67% of Oxford residents with monies raised use to subsidise Park & Ride services, typically used by non-Oxford residents.</p> <p>Public engagement undertaken by the proposers of all three unitary options (3UA, 2UA and 1UA) has consistently shown that people in Oxfordshire want councils which are closely linked to their communities and worry that bigger authorities lose touch with its residents – citing that some communities already feel they feel less in touch with services currently delivered on a county-wide scale.</p> <p>While the rural areas of Oxfordshire contain smaller settlements and market towns which each have their own identities and priorities, there has been a consistent voice in engagement that they see themselves as distinct from the city and would not want to have their identity merged with the city authority.</p>



LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		A single unitary would cover the densely populated Oxford area alongside the sparsely populated West Oxfordshire. It would be required to address both the urban deprivation issues of the city alongside the issues of rural isolation which drives deprivation across much the north of the county. Across other criteria we have set out the different areas of the county – and a single unitary authority across them would not be felt by Oxfordshire residents to be able to adequately address the distinct local priorities of its diverse places.
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	1	<p>A new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) spanning Oxfordshire, Berkshire and potentially Swindon is being proposed. This could cover a population up to of 1.9m, dependant on the authorities which form it⁵.</p> <p>A single unitary would be too close in size to the MSA and would account for at minimum 37% of its population. It would aim to take a strategic view across the whole county, which would be insufficiently distinct in remit to the strategic role of the MSA across the wider geography. A single unitary would not give sufficient ability to engage on local concerns and priorities.</p> <p>Even with weighted voting, a single representative at the MSA table risks diluting Oxfordshire's voice, as the next largest authority in the area is Swindon (233,100 residents at 2021 census)⁶. At the same time it would also weaken the voice of the city of Oxford when compared to other major urban areas within this MSA geography – particularly compared with Reading, Bracknell, Slough and Swindon (should these form parts of the emerging authority) – which would each have their own unitary authority to represent them. Comprising just 22% of Oxfordshire's population, the interests of Oxford are unlikely to be advanced at the MSA if these run contrary to the views of the wider county.</p> <p>Economic growth must be a central mission of the MSA. But for the MSA to be successful in this mission, strong pro-growth voices are needed around the table, and as noted above the 1UA proposal is silent on economic growth.</p>
Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	1	<p>As covered in earlier criteria, the single unitary would cover a broad geography, large population and several communities and settlements with distinct demands and priorities. This fundamentally makes it harder to engage at a local level. There is a risk that a single unitary would be too remote from the communities it serves to be able to engage most meaningfully.</p> <p>The requirement to work across such a broad range of places and priorities would make it harder to co-design services which meet local needs and mean a greater balance would need to be struck between</p>

^{5&6} 2021 Census

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		<p>the distinct requirements of places. This would cause issues when needing to be flexible to work to meet the specific needs of small rural hamlets, larger market towns and a densely populated urban area. The larger scale of the authority would reduce the ability to work flexibly and closely with specific neighbourhoods to empower them to shape the services in their areas.</p>

B.2 Two Unitary Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/) advantaged areas	2	<p>A 2UA model, based on the proposed Oxford and Shires and Ridgeway Councils would serve populations of 471,716 and 482,703 respectively. These are of more appropriate scale than the 1UA proposal. For this option, the existing unitary of West Berkshire would be incorporated into Ridgeway. This would cement an artificial administrative boundary within the Oxford conurbation, that would see residents on either side of the artificial dividing line – in some cases on adjacent streets – receiving different services.</p> <p>As it constrains the city of Oxford on three sides, the 2UA proposal would see continued cross-boundary issues around development. Appendix D of the 2UA Proposal rules out ‘wholesale opening up the Green Belt’ to enable Oxford’s growth, instead it sets out a vision of supporting Oxford’s economy through delivery of the new town at the former USAF Airbase Heyford Park. Yet, as the Volterra report shows, preventing growth adjacent to the city would remove agglomeration benefits and fail to realise the opportunity to expand Oxford’s globally significant economy that the Government’s Oxford Growth Commission was set up to achieve. It would also lead to an increase in already unsustainable commuting patterns across Oxfordshire that have led to economy-sapping levels of congestion.</p> <p>Ridgeway Broadly, the proposal of Ridgeway appears to give a suitable geography for a single authority.</p> <p>The proposed Ridgeway authority would serve an area of distinct market towns and smaller settlements across a geography with strong historical ties and a relatively consistent set of demographics and priorities. Much of Ridgeway is rural with lower-density settlements and open countryside, although there are some larger towns such as Abingdon, Didcot and Henley which act as commuter and economic hubs. There are strong rail links which connect the towns in the south of the area to London via Reading.</p> <p>A proposed Ridgeway authority which retains the current boundary with Oxford City Council (which would become part of Oxford and Shires under this proposal) would retain a tight boundary around the city. This would mean a large proportion of Oxford’s current Green Belt would be within Ridgeway. Retaining this would limit the ability to release Green Belt land for housing development, given the large areas of land available across Ridgeway. This would require housebuilding to be spread across a wider area. However, broadly plans developed historically by authorities in this area have emphasised a priority to preserve the countryside and characteristics of existing settlements, which spreading housing demand would conflict with.</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		<p>The 3UA proposal for Ridgeway deals with this issue by moving its northern boundary to the edge of Oxford's Green Belt. In most other respects the 2UA and 3UA visions for Ridgeway align.</p> <p>Oxford & Shires</p> <p>The proposed authority of Oxford and Shires would create a unitary with two distinct characteristics – the urban area of Oxford and the rural and market towns of the remaining area. This would present challenges to meeting the quite distinct needs of these two contrasting places.</p> <p>The geographies within this authority would be highly contrasting – containing both the second least densely populated area (current West Oxfordshire) with the fifth most densely populated urban area (Oxford) in South East England. This also reflects in very different needs for the areas – with the rural areas experiencing deprivation of access to services while in Oxford deprivation is more in line with those seen in other urban areas across the country.</p> <p>Fresh data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025 show relative consistency across the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire, with the city of Oxford presenting a significantly distinct population. Oxford is distinctly younger in age, driven particularly by student age population. In 2022, only 11% of Oxford's population was of state pension age, compared to 17% in Cherwell and 20.77% in West Oxfordshire⁷. Differences are also reflected in homes – with only 46.7% of residents of Oxford owning their own home, compared to 67% in Cherwell and 69% in West Oxfordshire. Similarly, there is a far higher rate of private and social renting in Oxford than seen in the rest of the authority⁸.</p> <p>As highlighted above the proposal for Oxford and Shires would favour growth in market towns over that of Oxford, the area's economic engine, and it infers that housing growth is more important than jobs growth. Were that policy position to change once the created, the new authority would nonetheless struggle to release Green Belt land for development due to the wide availability of land across the rest of the authority. This would result in less homes being built, less ability to address the chronic housing shortage which drives demand and high house prices in Oxford and requiring more homes to be built in rural areas, impacting the countryside and changing the characteristics of settlements.</p>

⁷ Subnational population projections for England: 2022-based, ONS

⁸ Census 2021



LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2	<p>Oxford and Shires and Ridgeway would have council tax bases of 156,233 and 191,302 respectively. They would also have total annual expenditure in the region of £556m for Oxford and Shires and £561m for Ridgeway, which would put them in a strong position to withstand financial shocks.</p> <p>A two authority model would be able to make substantial savings from the economies of scale by streamlining management structures, staffing and systems. By including West Berkshire, the 2UA proposal extends the geography over which efficiencies can be achieved and capacity created, and the savings it would achieve are not dissimilar to those of 1UA. It also derisks the likelihood of future financial shocks, and should remove West Berkshire's current need for Exceptional Financial Support from Government.</p> <p>However, this should be seen within the larger context of the cost of demand for services. Savings from rationalisation will deliver in the short term, but growth in demand for services would be greater than this amount unless public service reform delivers place-based preventative work which addresses needs. While Ridgeway would be able to focus on its relatively consistent priorities given its homogeneous demographics, Oxford and Shires would face challenges in needing to balance the varied and unique circumstances of their communities. Most difficult for this would be balancing Oxford's needs as a major city with the priorities and demands of the dispersed population of the current West Oxfordshire. Combining these into a single authority would be less likely to deliver the right services to address demand than a 3UA model.</p> <p>The 2UA model would, however, be more agile and able to deliver public sector reform than a single unitary. It should be noted that there is no reason why two or more unitary authorities would not be able to partner to deliver shared services and leverage economies of scale at a larger level where it would make sense to do so.</p>
Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	2	<p>A 2UA model would, while incorporating two existing two social care structures into two new authorities, would still involve some disruption to key statutory services such as Adult and Children's Social Care. Additionally, lower tier services would also undergo change through aggregating functions across districts.</p> <p>As set out elsewhere in the proposal, LGR should be seen as a major, generational opportunity to deliver public sector reform. This should focus on high quality, sustainable services which meet current need and can be agile to future requirements. Doing this relies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep understanding of the circumstances and needs of local communities

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ability to deliver transformation rapidly and in an agile manner • The flexibility to join and tailor services to meet local needs (for example around social care, housing, health, benefits, education and employment). <p>The 2UA model would be more able to tailor services to meet the needs of its geographies than the single unitary option. However, while it would be most able to do this in the Ridgeway area, the contrasting populations, demands and priorities of Oxford and Shires would require a constant balance between two very distinct areas within one authority. This would impact on the quality of services, as they would be less able to be tailored to these very varied communities.</p>
Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	2	<p>The issues outlined elsewhere in this appraisal would be apparent here in relation to Oxford and Shires. While the Ridgeway would be able to respond to local needs across its villages and market towns, Oxford and Shires would need to meet the very different needs of both the city and the rural areas it contains. It would need to consider the views of the highly rural and dispersed population of West Oxfordshire alongside those of a major city (Oxford), as well as the major market towns (such as Banbury and Bicester).</p> <p>The 2UA proposal has been developed by district councils across Oxfordshire and the current unitary of West Berkshire. This work has developed a view of the place across Oxfordshire informed by these places, which any successful proposal should listen to.</p> <p>However, engagement across Oxfordshire by both the two and three unitary authorities proposals has consistently stated that there is a strong local view that councils should be close to their communities and not be so big that they lose touch with residents. Residents want to see councils based on areas relevant to their communities. As demonstrated even by its name, Oxford and Shires would clearly be trying to balance between two distinct areas and trying to respond to these views rather than able to focus on more specific local needs. Public engagement undertaken in Banbury as part of the 3UA proposal development found people there unhappy about the prospect of being in a unitary council dominated by Oxford.</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	2	<p>A new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) spanning Oxford, Berkshire and potentially Swindon is being proposed. This could cover a population up to of 1.9m, dependant on the authorities which form it.</p> <p>The 2UA authority proposal would better support Oxfordshire's needs within the MSA than 1UA, by ensuring two voices at the strategic authority table. It would also provide better focus on specific areas for delivery and work in a more place-based way.</p> <p>However, the rural areas of the north of the county and the city would only have one voice in this MSA. The Oxford and Shires seat at the table would always have to speak for two places, with distinct demands and priorities always requiring balance. The authority would be made up of 63% voices outside Oxford and only 37% of those within Oxford – meaning that a major UK city that will be essential to the growth ambitions of the MSA and country would not have a majority voice within its own representing authority.</p> <p>As highlighted above, Appendix D of the 2UA proposal advocates market town growth ahead of Green Belt release and the growth of Oxford. As Volterra highlights, this will see overall lower levels of growth achieved than the 3UA proposal and is likely to run counter to the objectives of the devolved strategic authority.</p>
Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	2	<p>As covered earlier in the Options Appraisal, the Ridgeway authority would be able to engage strongly with its populations and speak for the more aligned priorities and concerns of this area which has a historically strongly connected identity. However, there would be a greater challenge in being able to co-create services across Oxford and Shires. While any community engagement will need to respond to hyper-local responses which can vary across neighbourhoods, taking in the highly different experiences and priorities of rural areas with the city of Oxford presents a significant challenge.</p> <p>In engagement, the citizens of rural towns and villages across the county have been clear: the city of Oxford does not define Oxfordshire. Creating an authority which attempts to combine these communities would not be responding to this engagement. It would mean that those living in "Shires" would always feel that their priorities are always having to be considered in balance with that of Oxford, and vice versa. This would limit the feeling of true empowerment for these areas.</p>

B.3 Three Unitary authorities (3UA) Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/) advantaged areas	3	<p>Within this proposal, a single tier of local government is achieved as three new unitary authorities are created from the current two-tier, seven authority system, a Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway.</p> <p>Each of the three unitary areas have ensured a sensible economic area with balanced tax bases and are designed to recognise the different needs, demands, challenges and economic strengths across Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway. They all share a common ambition to build a more prosperous future for all of those in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. They can best achieve this by being focused on their own particular areas. No part of Oxfordshire has a single unified identity or demographic. However, by splitting the broadly different rural and market town areas of Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway from the Greater Oxford's urban geography and the satellite villages that have close connections to the city, the 3UA proposal creates authorities each of which can best work within the context of its own place.</p> <p>The 3UA model will deliver on the Government's mission to increase housing supply in responding to local need and with local coordination. It will allow for the building of up to 40,000 homes over the next 15 years through release of Green Belt land around Oxford – significantly ahead of Government housing targets, which alternative proposals cannot match.</p> <p>The proposed service delivery models have been informed and developed through thorough engagement with council members, key stakeholders and wider engagement groups including businesses and residents. The financial implications of reorganisation - including costs, savings and income – have also been assessed for the 3UA model.</p> <p>Each area proposal sets out how the new unitary councils will have the required leadership and capacity at the optimum scale and proximity to residents to respond to the needs and challenges of each place.</p>



LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2	<p>This proposal sets up three authorities: Greater Oxford with an annual revenue expenditure of £396m; Northern Oxfordshire with an annual revenue expenditure of £431m; and Ridgeway with an annual revenue expenditure of £749m. All three unitary authorities are therefore of a scale which would suitably withstand financial shocks. They are optimally sized for success: large enough to achieve economies of scale but not so large as to dilute local identity or weaken financial control. They are far from outliers in either tax base or population served and each demonstrates a scale consistent with fiscal viability and capacity. All authorities would be able to demonstrate strong core spending power supported by their tax base size and composition.</p> <p>The modelling suggests that payback period for this proposal is within 4 years and there are then ongoing savings of around £48.6 million per annum for the aggregated position of all 3 unitary authorities going forward. The analysis shows this 3UA proposal is the right size to achieve these efficiencies. These are c£14m pa lower than the 1UA or 2UA proposals in 2032/33. However, it is noted that this modelling hasn't included the additional tax revenues that will be generated by the significant increase in both business rates and council tax in Greater Oxford due to its growth proposals.</p> <p>The total population of the three unitary areas currently is 935,000. Greater Oxford has 240,000 residents, Northern Oxfordshire has 265,000 residents, and Ridgeway has 430,000 residents. Rapid housing delivery in line with Government targets will see significant population growth by 2040 to 370,000 in Northern Oxfordshire (including the delivery of 13k homes in Upper Heyford) and 545,000 in Ridgeway. Housing delivery in Greater Oxford will exceed Government targets leading to a population of 345,000 by 2040.</p> <p>This proposal sets out why the areas proposed are smaller than 500,000 based on the specific and distinct geographies and demographics of each unitary, the need to represent each area distinctly as part of devolution, as well as being required for suitable levels of Green Belt release to maximise and support growth. It is also noted that national research has found that there is not a correlation between better outcomes and larger population size of authorities (outlined in section 4.3 of this proposal).</p> <p>The 3UA proposal will deliver efficiency savings in aggregate and in the individual new unitary authorities arising from ICT, support services, managerial, democratic processes, the disposal and rationalisation of property transferred and external audit costs.</p> <p>Additionally, savings will be driven from transformation involving early intervention to reduce demand pressures in Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Transformation will also involve the integration</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		of waste collection and disposal, a business case for which is already in development. In the 3UA proposal, in addition to increased council income for all new unitary authorities arising from the ability to levy the Adult Social Care Premium, significant increased income will arise from growth in dwelling numbers and new businesses. The balance sheet financial strength analysis suggests that each unitary should be able manage these transitional costs with some of the authorities, such as Oxford, already making early provision of costs in the current round of medium-term financial planning. Where possible, use will be made of the flexible use of capital receipts to support transformation projects.
Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	3	<p>The 3UA proposal will ensure services are tailored to local circumstances and will be developed collaboratively with local communities and partners. The focus will be on the development of a transformative, preventative model that links growth to improved outcomes and reduced inequality. Independent assessment has shown all three unitary authorities would be able to provide sustainable services. Each unitary will be able to take a single coordinated approach to addressing priorities for their area. Decisions can focus on the needs of specific areas, and the integrated model allows for more agile service delivery.</p> <p>The proposal shows how 3UA will be more agile, connected to their local communities and able to work collaboratively with partners. Services will be commissioned and delivered at the most appropriate level, some across multiple authorities. For example, each authority will have its own sovereign Children's Services, but NHS joint commissioning and Safeguarding Boards will operate across all three unitary authorities. Services will be explicitly designed to respond to local circumstances and improve outcomes to give residents the best quality of life with a mix of direct delivery and shared services. This will be achieved through the creation of efficiencies from consolidation while also investing in new capacity, digital capability, and innovative service models to underpin long-term viability.</p> <p>The 3UA proposal aligns with the wider public sector reform agenda including the NHS ten-year plan, and Devolution. It focuses on data-led, place-based and integrated Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P), tailoring collaborative service delivery to respond to community needs effectively in each unitary area, ensuring better value for money organisationally and at a systems level.</p> <p>The proposal for 3UA has considered the impact of a range of crucial public services and how the new unitary authorities can deliver better public services that improve outcomes for residents, through identifying and addressing needs in a timely manner. This includes:</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localised approach to Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and SEND – the 3UA will deliver their own sovereign services with collaboration on critical areas with other unitary authorities to effectively fulfil statutory duties, maintain economies of scale and avoid unnecessary disaggregation • Community-based EI&P model boosting community networks and resilience • In-house statutory homelessness services rooted in prevention
Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	3	<p>Collaborative work with the five other Oxfordshire councils, and West Berkshire, took place to develop proposals for reorganising local government. Collective agreement was made to a shared data protocol to ensure consistent baseline comparisons, and a series of teach-in sessions were delivered across the councils. As a proposer of a 3UA model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, Oxford City Council's Leader, Chief Executive, and Leadership Team actively worked with the other councils to shape the proposal.</p> <p>A comprehensive and inclusive engagement programme was delivered across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to support the proposal for Local Government Reorganisation. A diverse range of methods and strategies were carefully designed to ensure meaningful, constructive, inclusive, and representative participation throughout the process.</p> <p>The proposal protects Oxfordshire's historic and cultural identity while aligning governance with natural community boundaries. It gives residents more say in local planning and ensures services are tailored to urban, rural, and market town needs. Development is directed to less sensitive areas, balancing growth with housing, heritage, and environmental protection. It strengthens local representation and delivers smarter, place-based decision-making.</p> <p>Feedback indicated strong support for smaller, locally responsive councils, alongside concerns regarding transport, housing, respecting local identity, and representation. Feedback has been used to tailor approaches and respond to green space protection, urban – rural balance, financial sustainability and improving services and access.</p>

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	3	<p>This proposal for 3UA structures was developed concurrently with preparation of an Expression of Interest for devolution to create a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The proposal sets out how it will create constituent authorities which provide a balance of three voices for Oxfordshire to the MSA, representing its distinct places and suitably balancing representation of the urban and rural populations.</p> <p>The creation of the 3UA across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire will help ensure there is closer parity in scale among the constituent unitary authorities within a Thames Valley MSA than a single Oxfordshire unitary council which would be around 37% the population size of the MSA itself.</p> <p>3UA would ensure that Oxford would have a suitable voice representing this key city and growth area to the MSA. The Greater Oxford proposal ensures that 71% of the residents of this unitary would be in the city of Oxford. This is a far greater proportion than the 2UA (37%) or 1UA (22%) proposals – which would mean needing to balance competing rural and urban voices to a far greater extent. This proposal means that Greater Oxford can speak for Oxford and its immediate surroundings, and Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway can speak to their own distinct communities.</p> <p>Alignment of timing for vesting of the three new unitaries and the MSA in 2028 will also ensure a smooth transition for Fire & Rescue Services and associated emergency planning functions to the new strategic authority.</p>
Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	3	<p>3UA will allow for governance that is more tailored and representative. This proposal will support local leaders to better understand and tackle the unique challenges and opportunities within their areas. Explicit within this proposal are arrangements that will support increased community engagement in democratic processes, but also the design of local authority services and community empowerment more generally.</p> <p>A community place-based approach will see enhanced neighbourhood engagement and delivery models. The three unitary authorities will co-design with residents and partners neighbourhood governance arrangements to support local requirements. This will deliver decision making at the lowest effective level to speed up delivery and growth, tailored to each community's circumstance.</p> <p>Parish and Town Councils will retain their independence and functions. Where present, they will be invited to participate in Neighbourhood Area Committees. Our approach supports local decision-making building on existing networks understanding the Oxford speaks clearly for the city, while towns and villages across Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway are empowered to speak for themselves.</p>







Appendix C: **Volterra Oxfordshire LGR Economic Growth Report**



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

Economic Growth Report

October 2025

volterra.co.uk



Contents

1.	Executive Summary	4
2.	Introduction	7
	Context	7
	Proposals under consideration	7
	Purpose of this report	8
3.	Why Greater Oxford?	9
	Why cities drive growth	9
	The evidence on productivity uplift	9
	Why Oxford is globally and economically important	10
	Oxford's constraints are holding it back	11
	Oxford is where businesses want to locate	12
	The case for Greater Oxford	15
	What Greater Oxford unlocks	17
4.	A coherent economic geography	18
	Framing Oxford's economic geography	18
	Identifying Oxford City's coherent economic geography	18
	Synthesising Oxford City's coherent economic geography	19
5.	Employment growth potential under different options	22
	Employment growth forecasts	22
	Housing implications	29
6.	Additionality, agglomeration and productivity uplift	33
	Approach	33
	Results	34
7.	Inclusive growth	37
	OCC's track record	37
	Enhancing inclusivity through scale and governance	37
	Delivering more affordable housing	38
		2



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



	Expanding access to community facilities	38
8.	Appendix A	39
	Assumptions underlying the homes-to-jobs ratio	39
9.	Appendix B	40
	Technical appendix – additionality and agglomeration methodology	40



Executive summary

Oxford is globally and economically significant

- Oxford is dominated by **high-tech, R&D, higher education industries** which are particularly sensitive to the benefits of agglomeration.
- Home to the **top-tier University of Oxford**, ranked among the top five universities worldwide (over £3bn in research income in FY23/24).
- The university has produced more than **205 spin-outs** since 2011, around 16% of the UK total.
- **The city has strong FDI momentum**; Oxford consistently ranks among the UK's top cities for FDI (ranked 6th in 2024).



128,000 jobs

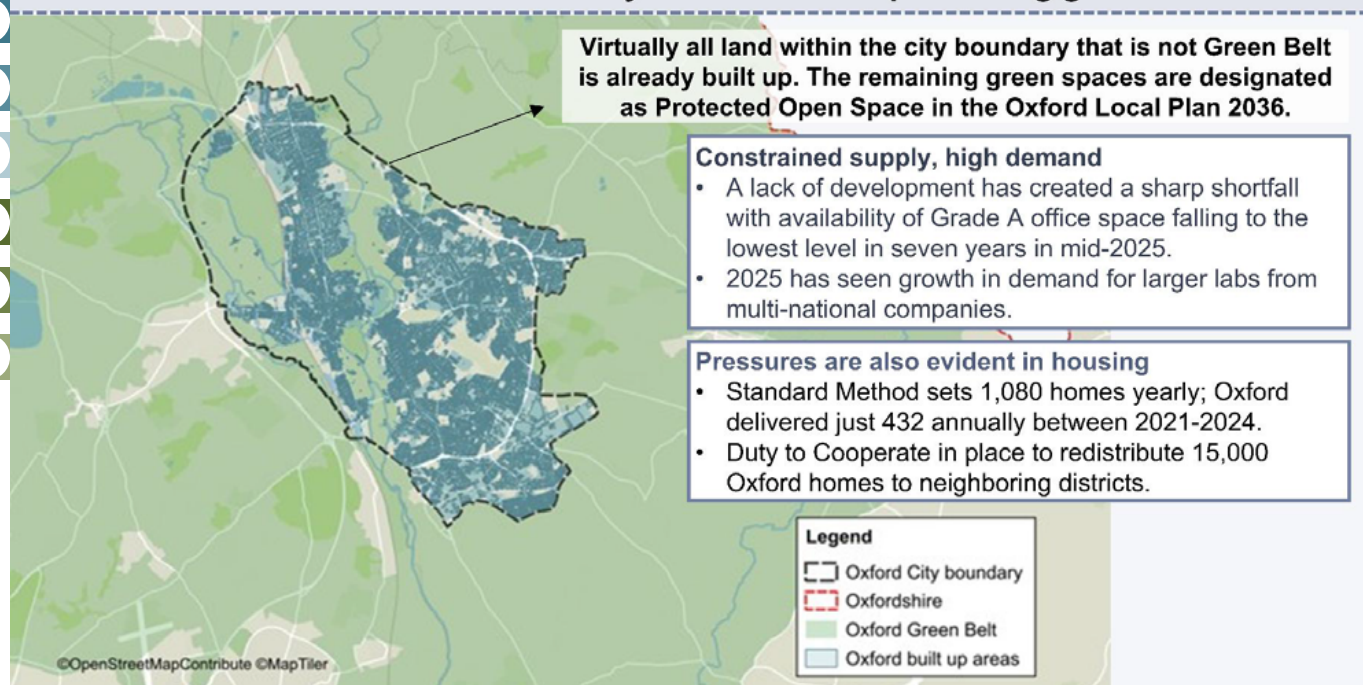


5,000 businesses



~£8.5bn GVA per year
(~35% of Oxfordshire total)

Oxford's land and boundary constraints are preventing growth



The evidence is clear: the edge-of-Oxford City is where businesses want to locate

With the city-centre constrained, the next best alternative is edge-of-city sites. High-value firms have consistent locational patterns – proximity to Oxford's research base but also space to grow, which only edge-of-city sites can provide.

Core locational preferences of high-value firms include:

- Substantial plots of land** with space to grow*
- Proximity to world-class research institutions**
- Access to world class talent**
- Amenities** that support productivity and retention
- High-quality infrastructure and utilities**
- Excellent public transport connectivity**
- Critical mass and community**

**life sciences firms in particular*

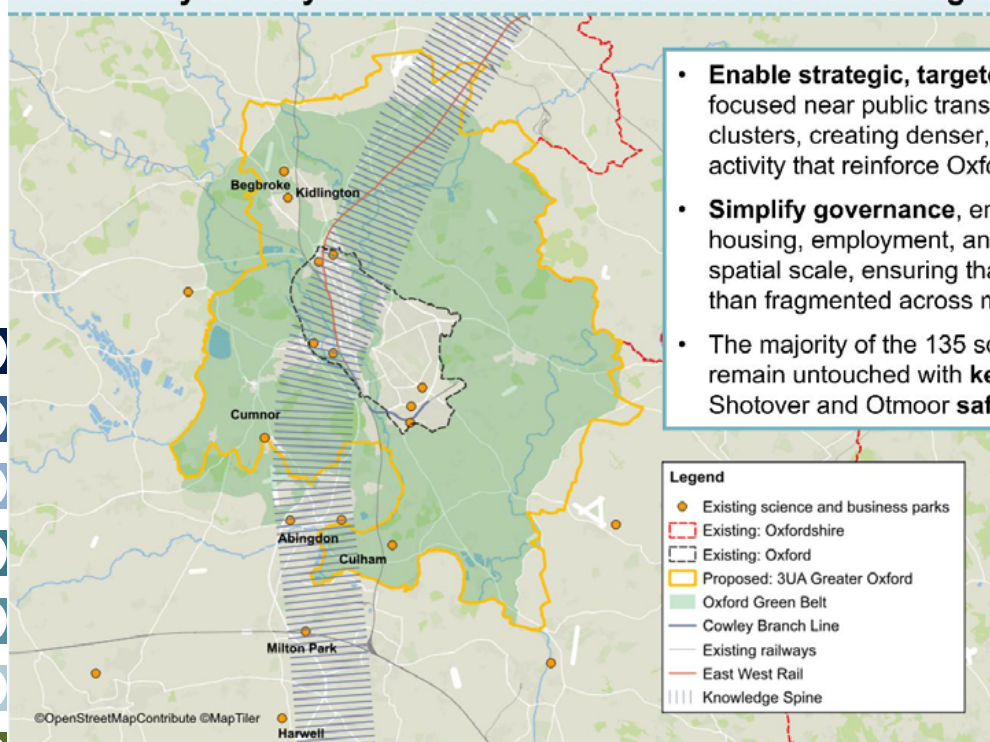
Many leading companies have already chosen locations just on or outside the current city boundary:



For many sectors, Oxford is the only viable cluster that they could locate in within the UK. While other locations in Oxfordshire exist for some businesses (e.g. Harwell), many occupiers prefer edge-of-city Oxford.



A 3UA model is the solution, expanding the boundary through a Greater Oxford (GO) authority directly addresses this constraint while unlocking land in the right places



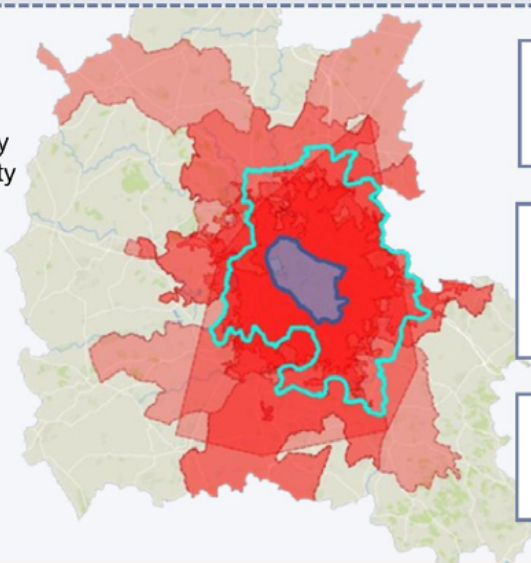
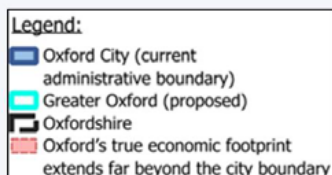
- **Enable strategic, targeted Green Belt release** focused near public transport and existing employment clusters, creating denser, more efficient patterns of activity that reinforce Oxford's global competitiveness.
- **Simplify governance**, enabling integrated planning of housing, employment, and infrastructure at the right spatial scale, ensuring that growth is coordinated rather than fragmented across multiple districts.
- The majority of the 135 square miles Green Belt would remain untouched with **key ecological assets** such as Shotover and Otmoor **safeguarded**.

Not only does GO make sense, but the 3UA Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway UAs are also well justified, as the proposal enables each UA to focus on their distinct economic strengths.

GO better aligns with the city's functional economy

Indicators overlayed in map:

- 30-min drive time
- 45-minute cycle
- 50 + commuter to Oxford City
- 100+ commuter to Oxford City
- Grouping of key Oxford business parks



Taken together, these map layers reveal a distinct concentration of activity within the proposed GO area.

The density of commuting patterns, employment hubs, and innovation clusters clearly demonstrates how economic networks extend across current administrative boundaries.

Governance and planning should reflect this functional geography rather than the more limited city boundary.

The 3UA model enables stronger region-wide growth than 2UA and 1UA proposals

Annual employment forecasts (compound annual growth rates):

3UA: 1.3%	2UA: 1.1%	1UA: 1.0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GO: ~1.5% by unlocking R&D through green belt release and strategic sites, maximising agglomeration benefits. • Northern Oxfordshire: 1.3% via mid-tech, tourism and agriculture. • Ridgeway: 1.2% through coordinated growth at Harwell, Milton and Didcot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxford and Shires: 1.1% as diluted focus by combining urban and rural priorities, making green belt release harder. • Ridgeway: moderates from 3UA to 1.1% as it must absorb Oxford commuter housing while pursuing Science Vale and Didcot expansion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single county-wide UA grows slowest (~1.0%) as competing priorities hinder bold, place-specific strategies. • Growth is steady but incremental; 2UA performs slightly better with clearer priorities and stronger place branding.

This growth would accelerate housing delivery, helping retain talent in the area while easing affordability pressures



The wider GO boundary not only enables higher economic growth but also allows Oxford to meet constrained and increased housing needs, easing pressure on surrounding districts to accommodate Oxford's unmet demand.

Oxford faces a severe affordability crisis; average house prices exceed 11× average earnings.

Under-delivery of housing makes it hard to retain staff in key sectors (NHS, academia, tech).

~40,000
mixed-tenure homes
could be delivered
through GO over 15
years.

This would help ease
affordability pressures,
retain skilled workers
and ease pressure on
surrounding districts.

Job and housing growth are aligned, with housing estimates from each proposal's job growth analysis demonstrating that forecast homes are achievable and realistic when compared with existing targets and standards.

The 3UA delivers additional, more productive growth compared to the other proposals

Not only does the 3UA proposal deliver the largest GVA uplift, being

£4.7bn

higher per year than the 2UA option by 2050 – but it also **concentrates jobs closer to Oxford's core, increasing density and productivity**. This results in an agglomeration benefit per worker being

£930

higher in 2050 under the 3UA proposal than under the 2UA proposal.

	3UA	2UA	1UA*
Baseline (2023)			
Employment (2023)	505,100	505,100	505,100
Annual GVA (2023) (£bn)	£38.4	£38.4	£38.4
Growth (2023-2050)			
Employment growth (2023-2050)	218,000	180,000	153,000
Forecast impacts (2050)			
Annual direct GVA (2050) (£bn)	£64.1	£59.3	£56.8
Annual GVA from agglomeration (2050) (£bn)	£0.83	£0.12	£0.00
Annual total GVA (2050) (£bn)	£64.9	£59.5	£56.8
Agglomeration benefit per worker (2050, relative to 2023)	£1,083	£155	£0.00
NPV over 27-year period (2023-2050), total additional from 2023			
Direct GVA (£bn)	£163.5	£141.2	£125.7
GVA from agglomeration (£bn)	£5.3	£0.8	£0.0
Total GVA NPV (£bn)	£168.8	£142.0	£125.7
NPV over 27-year period (2023-2050), relative to reference case			
Direct GVA relative to reference case (£bn)	£37.8	£15.5	Reference case
GVA from agglomeration relative to reference case (£bn)	£5.3	£0.8	Reference case
Total GVA NPV relative to reference case (£bn)	£43.1	£16.3	Reference case

**West Berkshire is added to the 1UA option with historic rates of employment growth continuing to 2050 to allow for direct comparison with the 3UA and 2UA options*

By adopting the 3UA proposal, the county will move from constraint to capacity, driven by clear governance, faster delivery, higher productivity and inclusive growth.



2. Introduction

2.1 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is a key part of the Government’s current programme for reform, alongside the expansion of devolved powers through Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Volterra has been commissioned by Oxford City Council (OCC) to analyse the economic benefits of the different options for local government reorganisation. This report assesses the potential impacts of the Greater Oxford (GO) proposal and compares them to alternative options for the future governance of Oxfordshire.

Context

2.2 On 16 December 2024, the Government published a white paper, setting out its ambitions for a national programme of devolution and local government reform.¹ The aim is to simplify governance, improve efficiency, and strengthen local leadership by creating larger, more capable unitary authorities. This would replace the remaining two-tier arrangements in areas such as Oxfordshire, where responsibilities are currently split between district and county councils. The reforms are intended to streamline decision-making, enhance accountability, reduce duplication, and deliver better value for money, while supporting economic growth and more responsive public services.

2.3 The Government has invited councils in Oxfordshire to submit proposals for LGR by 28 November 2025. It will then decide on the preferred unitary structure for the county, with the new council(s) expected to be formed in 2028, in line with the Government’s indicative timeline.

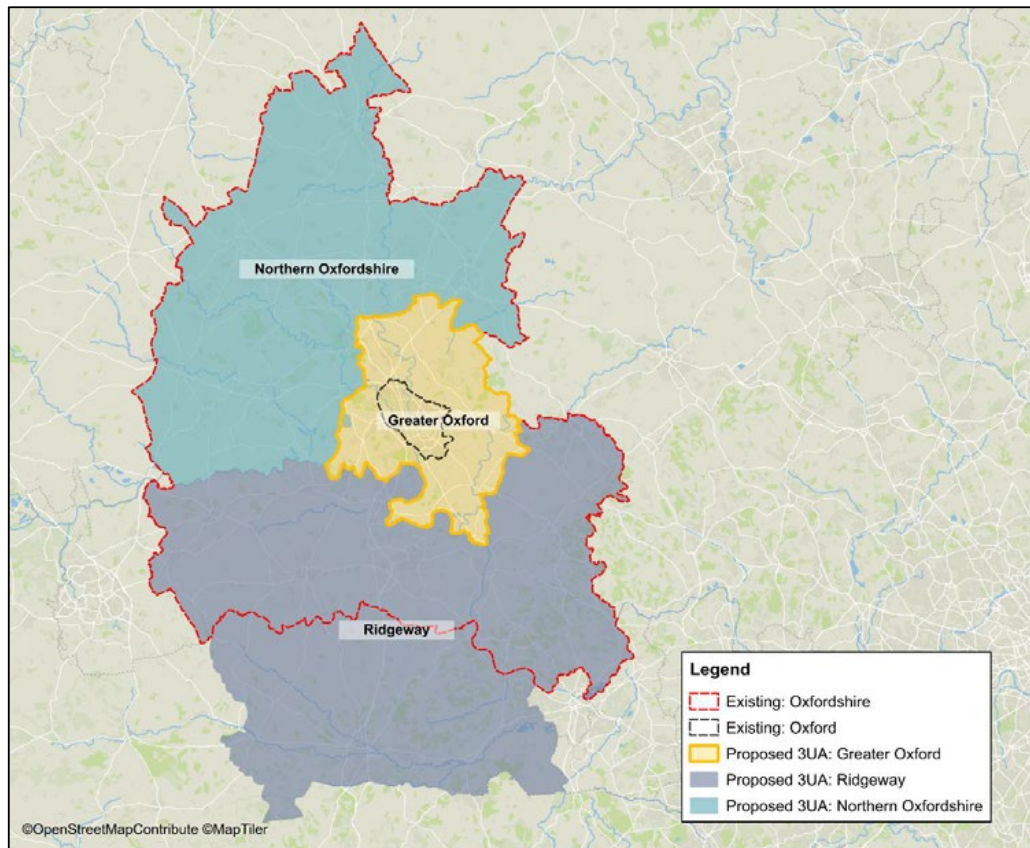
Proposals under consideration

2.4 In Oxfordshire, three structural options are under consideration:

1. **Three Unitary Authorities (3UA):** proposed by Oxford City Council (see Figure 1).
This would comprise:
 - A *GO Council* – covering Oxford and its surrounding area;
 - A *Northern Oxfordshire Council* – covering the north and west of the county; and
 - A *Ridgeway Council* – covering much of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Berkshire.
2. **Two Unitary Authorities (2UA):** proposed by the other four Oxfordshire district councils (Cherwell, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire, and West Oxfordshire) together with West Berkshire Council.
This would involve:
 - *Oxford and Shires Council* – covering Cherwell, Oxford City, and West Oxfordshire; and
 - *Ridgeway Council* – covering South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Berkshire.
3. **One Unitary Authority (1UA):** proposed by Oxfordshire County Council.
 - This would see a single authority covering the current county council area, replacing all five existing district councils (excludes West Berkshire).

2.5 **Figure 1** sets out the proposed boundaries for the 3UA proposal.

¹ MHCLG, 2024. [English Devolution White Paper](#)

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation**Figure 1 – 3UA proposal**

Purpose of this report

2.6

The purpose of this report is to provide a clear, evidence-based comparison of the three proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire. It focuses on the potential impacts of the GO proposal, assessing how it is likely to perform relative to the alternative 2UA and 1UA options.



3. Why Greater Oxford?

- 3.1 Boundary change is not an end in itself. The GO proposal matters because it shifts where growth happens. By aligning planning, housing and transport for Oxford's functional economic area, GO enables targeted land release close to the city's core and along public transport corridors. This facilitates a higher rate of jobs growth, raising effective density both through two channels – both more jobs but also the number of jobs accessible to existing clusters within short, reliable travel times. This increased effective density in turn drives productivity, wages and fiscal yield, while supporting inclusive access to jobs and services. Sections 4–6 quantify these channels.

Why cities drive growth

- 3.2 In modern economies, cities account for a disproportionate share of jobs, innovation and output. They concentrate knowledge-intensive activity and act as gateways to global markets, making them central to national productivity and competitiveness.
- 3.3 Cities are powerful drivers of economic growth because they concentrate people, businesses, and institutions in close proximity. This spatial concentration generates agglomeration effects, the productivity advantages that occur when economic activity clusters.² A strong evidence base shows that agglomeration leads to higher productivity, wages, innovation, and resilience, making cities the engines of national growth.³ The section below, '**Why Oxford is globally and economically important**', demonstrates that Oxford is a key driver of the national economy in terms of many of these dimensions.
- 3.4 Agglomeration works through three interrelated channels:⁴



Sharing: Firms benefit from shared infrastructure and services, achieving economies of scale and reducing operational costs.



Learning: Frequent interaction accelerates and enables ideas and innovations to spread rapidly among firms and institutions. In Oxford's case, this is concentrated along the "Knowledge Spine," linking research, science parks, and key employment hubs (see **Figure 3**).⁵



Matching: Dense labour markets make it easier for employers to find the right skills and for workers to find suitable, high-quality jobs. These specialised labour markets attract and retain highly skilled workers essential for innovation-driven sectors.^{6,7}

The evidence on productivity uplift

- 3.5 The empirical literature finds a systematic, city-wide link between density and productivity: when access to jobs improves, average productivity rises across the whole workforce, not just among new arrivals. Effects are strongest in knowledge-intensive services – a sector mix in which Oxford is particularly specialised. Empirical studies demonstrate that:

- A 10% increase in cluster size is associated with a 0.67% increase the number of patents produced by a scientist in a year, reflecting a productivity boost across all inventors in the cluster, not just new arrivals.⁸

² Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

³ European Central Bank, 2024. Time-varying agglomeration economies and aggregate wage growth

⁴ Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, 2016. Micro-foundations of urban agglomeration economies

⁵ Small Business Economics. 2025. Hidden champions and knowledge spillovers: innovation-enhancing agglomeration effects and niche technology specificity

⁶ Department for Transport, 2025. [TAG Unit A2.4 Appraisal of Productivity Impacts](#)

⁷ Innovation Caucus. 2022. Understanding Cluster Growth Potential

⁸ National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022. Place-based productivity and costs in science

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

- A doubling of city size increases productivity by approximately 4.4% on average.⁹
- In knowledge based sectors, the effect is stronger: for example, in business services, productivity can rise up to 8.3% when a city size doubles.¹⁰

3.6 The latter two findings relate to aggregate citywide productivity, meaning the gains are measured across the whole workforce in the city (all workers for the 4.4% and knowledge based workers for the 8.3%), not just among additional workers.

3.7 Additional employment sites benefit most from agglomeration effects when they are located close to the city's core employment areas or near existing employment clusters. The productivity advantages of agglomeration also depend on both physical and effective distance, meaning that more geographically distant sites can benefit if supported by strong transport connectivity. Therefore, additional edge-of-city employment sites that are adjacent to existing employment hubs or have fast, reliable links to the city's core can greatly capture these benefits.

3.8 The diminishing effects of distance on agglomeration are particularly pronounced in service and knowledge sectors, where innovation and growth rely on frequent face-to-face interaction and knowledge spillovers. By contrast, manufacturing is less reliant on such proximity and therefore experiences weaker productivity gains from clustering.¹¹

Why Oxford is globally and economically important

3.9 Oxford has a global reputation for high-value, knowledge-intensive activity, underpinned by world-class research institutions and a deep talent pool. Its innovation ecosystem generates spin-outs, scale-ups and globally competitive firms that anchor supply chains across the sub-region.

3.10 Oxford City is an economic hub, generating an estimated £8.5 billion GVA per year and supporting over 128,000 jobs across high-tech, research, professional services, and public administration sectors.^{12, 13} The city hosts approximately 5,000 businesses and contributes roughly £1.15 billion in income tax annually, reflecting its skilled workforce and high wages.^{14, 15}

3.11 Its reputation stems from the exceptional reputation of the University of Oxford, regularly ranked among the top five universities worldwide and recognised as one of the world's "super brands" on reputation ranking.¹⁶ The university's vast research income, over £3 billion in FY 2023–24, including nearly £779 million from grants and contracts, underpins an ecosystem of world-leading talent, innovation, and intellectual capital.

3.12 The university has produced more than 205 spin-outs since 2011, around 16% of the UK total, with firms such as Oxford Nanopore and Immunocore exemplifying its world-leading cluster.¹⁷ Oxford-based spinouts frequently make international headlines: an article on OrganOx, for example, was recently in the Financial Times for achieving a record-breaking \$1.5 billion acquisition, showcasing the city's strength in translating university-based research into global commercial success.¹⁸

3.13 This dynamic economic environment is further elevated by Oxford's sustained appeal to international investors. Oxford consistently ranks among the UK's top cities for foreign direct investment, ranked sixth nationally for inward FDI (behind just Inner London, London, Outer London, City of Edinburgh and Greater

⁹ Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

¹⁰ Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

¹¹ DfT, 2025. TAG Unit A2.4 Appraisal of Productivity Impacts

¹² ONS, 2023. Table 3: Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: local authorities by ITL1 region

¹³ BRES, 2023. Oxford Employment

¹⁴ OCC, 2025. Economic statistics

¹⁵ OCC, 2018. Oxford Economic Profile

¹⁶ Times Higher Education World University Rankings

¹⁷ Advent Research, 2025. [Life Sciences in Oxfordshire: Spin-Offs, Innovation and Investment](#)

¹⁸ Financial Times, 2025. Oxford university spinout OrganOx sold to Japanese group Terumo for \$1.5bn



Manchester).¹⁹ Recent high-profile commitments illustrate this momentum: in September 2025, Larry Ellison confirmed a £118 million AI-vaccine research grant and a £1 billion-plus campus investment, while GSK committed £50 million to a new cancer prevention research programme, both underscoring investor confidence in Oxford’s capabilities and ambition.²⁰

3.14

As set out above, Oxford’s economy is dominated by high-tech, research and development, and higher education industries particularly sensitive to the benefits of agglomeration. These sectors gain disproportionately from clustering and density, giving Oxford a greater potential uplift from agglomeration than other parts of Oxfordshire with less knowledge-intensive specialisms.

Oxford’s constraints are holding it back

3.15

Oxford’s economy is already globally significant, but growth is constrained by administrative boundaries and limited land supply near the core.

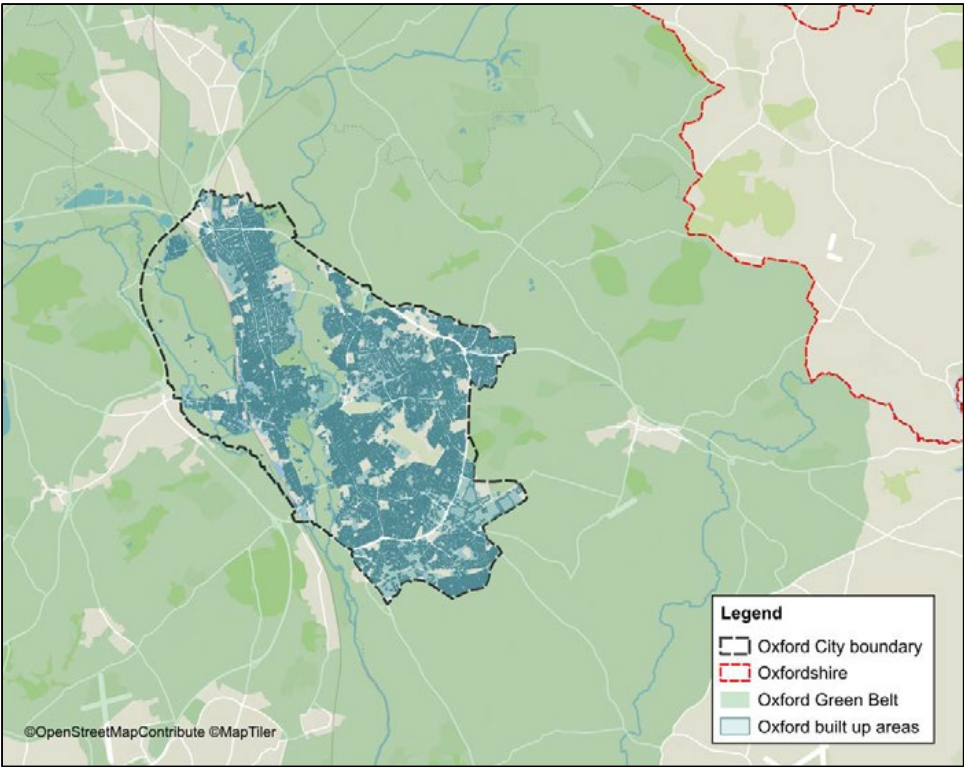
3.16

The tightly drawn boundary and surrounding Green Belt severely limit capacity for new jobs, homes and infrastructure in the most accessible locations. As a result, demand is displaced to less connected sites in neighbouring districts, diluting agglomeration benefits.

3.17

Figure 2 shows the built-up extent of Oxford and the Green Belt. Most non-Green Belt land within the boundary is already developed; remaining green spaces are protected for recreation, amenity and ecology through Local Plan policy. This leaves very limited scope for growth at the city’s heart under the status quo.²¹

Figure 2 – Built up areas within Oxford City and Green Belt overlay



¹⁹ Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, 2024. Oxford Maintains Top 10 Position For Most Attractive Location for FDI
²⁰ University of Oxford, 2025. Oxford launches major new AI vaccine research programme with the Ellison Institute of Technology
²¹ Oxford City Council, 2019. Oxford Local Plan 2036 - Adoption of the Plan



- 3.18
- Oxford’s growth sectors in particular, are constrained by land supply. In the first half of 2025, Bidwells reports that office prime rents have reached a new high (£63 psf) and occupiers show a clear preference for high-quality Grade A space to attract and retain staff. However, a lack of development has created a sharp shortfall with availability falling to just 119,600 sq ft in mid-2025, the lowest level in seven years.²²
- 3.19
- In terms of labs, Bidwells reports demand for larger labs from multi-national pharma companies and research institutes increased, in part because Oxford now has a ready supply of Grade A space for the first time since the pandemic.²³ This indicates a that a temporary increase in availability has resulted in this increase in demand.
- 3.20
- Similar pressures are evident in housing. The NPPF sets out statutory Standard Method (SM) housing targets for local authorities based on their existing stock and the affordability of housing within the local authority.²⁴ The Standard Method (SM) determines a need of 1,080 dwellings per annum in Oxford City, however, only 432 homes were added per year on average in Oxford between 2021 and 2024, which is significantly less than the new target demonstrating a realistic capacity of less than half of identified need. This is explicit recognition of Oxford’s constrained boundary.²⁵
- 3.21
- Policy history further underlines this point. Between 2016 and 2018, under the Duty to Cooperate, the Oxfordshire Growth Board agreed to redistribute around 15,000 homes of Oxford’s unmet need to neighbouring districts. This figure was embedded in the 2016 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and subsequently carried through into the Local Plans for Cherwell, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire, and West Oxfordshire.^{26,27,28} It was acknowledged in the Partial Review of the Cherwell Local Plan, that there is a pressing need to provide homes to meet the needs of Oxford that cannot be met within the boundaries of the city.²⁹
- 3.22
- These housing constraints exacerbate a well-documented jobs to housing imbalance. ONS data show Oxford has around 1.2 jobs per working-age resident, compared to 0.7–0.9 in the four surrounding Oxfordshire districts.³⁰ This imbalance generates significant in-commuting pressure.
- 3.23
- The combined effect is a mismatch between economic demand and land supply. It limits business growth, exacerbates affordability pressures, and creates planning tensions with surrounding authorities.

Oxford is where businesses want to locate

- 3.24
- High-value firms have consistent locational patterns – they need proximity to Oxford’s research base but also space to grow, which only edge-of-city sites can provide.
- 3.25
- While requirements vary by firm, global and high-growth companies in life sciences, advanced manufacturing and deep tech show consistent patterns in their locational needs.
- 3.26
- Core locational preferences include:**
 - Substantial plots of land with space to grow:** Labs and R&D buildings are lower-density and “space-hungry,” so occupiers look for sites that can take larger floorplates, specialist servicing and phased expansion; evidence consistently finds edge-of-urban locations offer the greatest scale and flexibility for these uses.³¹

²² Bidwells, 2025. Oxford Offices and Labs report

²³ Bidwells, 2025. Offices & Labs Databook Oxford - August 2025

²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG), 2024. National Planning Policy Framework

²⁵ BBC tracker, 2025. Some councils ordered to increase home building by 400%, new BBC tracker shows

²⁶ Oxfordshire County Council, 2016. Working together on county’s housing needs

²⁷ South Oxfordshire District Council, 2016. Authority Monitoring Report

²⁸ Cherwell District Council, 2016. Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031(Part 1) Partial Review - Oxford’s Unmet Housing Need

²⁹ Cherwell District Council, 2020. Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 Partial Review - Oxford’s Unmet Housing Need

³⁰ ONS, 2023. Job density per district

³¹ Icen, 2024. Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



- **Proximity to world-class research institutions:** High-growth firms benefit from close links to universities, hospitals and anchor companies to accelerate collaboration, tech transfer and recruitment. Innovation-district research sets out the importance co-location with anchor institutions; sector studies also note many smaller firms prefer to be located with institutions or research centres.³²
- **Access to skilled talent:** Deep pools of specialised labour, and pipelines from higher education, are central. Policy and market evidence repeatedly place talent at the heart of cluster competitiveness and site choice for deep-tech sectors.³³
- **Amenities that support productivity and retention:** The preferred model is an integrated, place-based campus that bundles quality premises with everyday amenities (cafés, gyms, green space) and spaces for interaction and collaboration.³⁴
- **High-quality infrastructure and utilities:** Modern labs typically require robust power, HVAC/clean-air systems and security, needs that are easier to deliver at campus scale; life-science buildings demand more specialised infrastructure than standard offices.³⁵
- **Excellent public transport connectivity:** Firms value rapid, reliable public transport and wider network access; innovation-district guidance highlights public transport-accessibility as a defining feature, and sector studies list sustainable/public transport links among key locational priorities.³⁶
- **Critical mass and community:** Successful locations cultivate a concentrated labour pool, peer networks and shared facilities that enable spillovers and collaboration, especially important for start-ups and scale-ups.³⁷

3.27

As city-centre space becomes more constrained, high value firms are increasingly opting for edge-of-city locations that provide the scale, flexibility and connectivity they require. For example, Cambridge's planning evidence (a close comparator market to Oxford) sets out that life science and tech occupiers "have historically been located on edge-of-centre campuses and out-of-town science parks," with edge-of-urban sites preferred for space and flexibility; urban centres remain popular but are "inherently space-limited."³⁸

3.28

The market is also shifting towards integrated, public transport-served campuses that combine fitted labs, grow-on space and everyday amenities. Around Oxford, this is evident in the growing number of nearby science and business parks (the location of these science and business parks are set out in **Figure 3**).^{39,40,41}

3.29

Oxford offers an unusually complete innovation ecosystem of research excellence, deep talent, specialist real estate, and global firms, an environment that other UK regions cannot match. This is evidenced by businesses comparing Oxford with global clusters like Boston or Silicon Valley, rather than with other UK cities.⁴²

3.30

This preference from high value firms to be located around Oxford is visible in firm behaviour: many leading companies have already chosen locations just outside the current city boundary (but within GO) to stay close to the research base and workforce while securing space and specification. The table below sets out three examples.

³² Brookings, 2014. The Rise of Innovation Districts: A New Geography of Innovation in America

³³ GOV.UK, 2025. UK Quantum Skills Taskforce report

³⁴ Iceni, 2024. Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs

³⁵ Savills, 2024. Life Science: Trends & Outlook

³⁶ Iceni, 2024. Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs

³⁷ Brookings, 2014. The Rise of Innovation Districts: A New Geography of Innovation in America

³⁸ Iceni, 2024. Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs

³⁹ Oxford Calling, 2025. Science and business parks

⁴⁰ Knight Frank. UK Life Sciences and Innovation: Labs Explained

⁴¹ CBRE, 2025. Global Life Sciences Atlas

⁴² Lambert Smith Hampton, 2020. Oxbridge Arc in Focus – The Knowledge Corridor



Table 1 – Companies that have established themselves within the GO boundary and either just inside (in the case of Nanopore) or outside of Oxford City

<div>Tokamak Energy</div> <p>Fusion energy company Tokamak Energy, a spin-out from the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Culham, Oxfordshire, has remained anchored locally, constructing its next-generation ST80-HTS prototype reactor on the Culham Campus.⁴³</p> <div><p>“Constructing the facility at Culham provides access to leading science and engineering capabilities, including [UKAEA’s] knowledge and experience in designing and operating the record-breaking JET tokamak.”</p><p>— Tokamak Energy</p></div>
<div>NANOPORE Technologies</div> <p>Oxford Nanopore is one of the UK’s most successful deep-tech firms, developing world-leading DNA and RNA sequencing technology now used in more than 120 countries. The company is headquartered at the Oxford Science Park, a location chosen for its proximity to the University of Oxford and the city’s globally recognised life sciences cluster. Being based just four miles from the university gives Oxford Nanopore unrivalled access to cutting-edge academic research, highly skilled graduates, and a dense ecosystem of biotech and med-tech firms.⁴⁴</p> <p>This combination of connectivity, talent, and infrastructure has helped Oxford Nanopore grow from a university spin-out into a FTSE-listed firm with a global footprint, while retaining deep roots in Oxford’s innovation ecosystem.</p>
<div>Adaptix</div> <p>Adaptix Ltd is a pioneering medical imaging company developing next-generation 3D X-ray technology that promises to transform diagnostic practice. Its portable imaging systems aim to deliver high-quality scans at the point of care, reducing the need for large, fixed equipment and improving accessibility for patients.</p> <p>Founded in 2014 and initially based at Harwell, Adaptix relocated to Begbroke Science Park to support its expansion to over 50 staff, including more than a dozen PhD-level researchers. The move provides the company with a unique competitive advantage: proximity to the University of Oxford, giving direct access to world-class expertise in materials science, engineering, and medical research, as well as specialist laboratory and prototyping facilities. Begbroke’s tailored innovation ecosystem, combined with practical services such as its dedicated shuttle link to Oxford, has enabled Adaptix to scale significantly while remaining embedded within the region’s globally recognised life sciences cluster.</p>

3.39

For many sectors, Oxford is uniquely complete in the UK for vaccines and immunology and nationally distinctive in genomics, quantum computing, fusion energy. For example, it is home to the country’s only fully integrated vaccine and immunology cluster, uniting world-leading institutions such as the University of Oxford, the Jenner Institute, the Oxford Vaccine Group, and the Clinical Biomanufacturing Facility. Together they provide a complete, end-to-end pipeline spanning discovery, development, clinical trials, and manufacturing. No other UK location offers this complete concentration of expertise and infrastructure.⁴⁵ This unique ecosystem enabled Oxford to deliver the world’s first COVID-19 vaccine trial within just four months of the virus being identified.⁴⁶ Other key sectors with clusters in and around Oxford include genomics, quantum computing, fusion energy and AI-enabled diagnostics.^{47,48}

⁴³ Culham Campus, 2023. Tokamak Energy’s new advanced fusion prototype to be built at UKAEA’s Culham Campus

⁴⁴ Oxford Nanopore Technologies, 2025. To enable the analysis of anything, by anyone, anywhere

⁴⁵ Clinical BioManufacturing Facility, 2025. Manufacturing a Covid-19 Vaccine

⁴⁶ UK Research and Innovation, 2025. The story behind the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine success

⁴⁷ Oxford Technology Park, 2025. IonQ announces agreement to acquire Oxford Ionics, accelerating path to pioneering breakthroughs in Quantum Computing.

⁴⁸ University of Oxford, 2018. Oxford secures £17.5 million to lead national AI healthcare programmes

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

3.40 The edge of the city is where Oxford can most effectively provide both proximity (to universities, hospitals, major employers and talent) and capacity (larger plots, lower-density lab formats, and future expansion). Market behaviour and pipelines at the edge of the city show high unmet demand demonstrating that additional, public transport-connected edge-of-city sites are the most effective way to capture additional high value investment.

3.41 In addition to edge of the city sites, there are other locations within Oxfordshire where firms may choose to establish themselves, driven by specific factors such as access to established business parks and employment hubs like Harwell (and others outlined in Figure 3). However, the locational preferences outlined above largely reflect the priorities of many high-tech, global firms, for whom proximity to the city centre and strong transport links are essential.

3.42 As such, while different firms and industries have varying locational requirements, there is a clear and pressing demand for edge of the city locations. Without the provision of such spaces, there is a risk that many firms could look to locate elsewhere in the world, rather than moving to other parts of Oxfordshire, where they may not be able to fulfil their specific needs.

The case for Greater Oxford

3.43 Oxford's global reputation, innovation ecosystem and firm demand point to huge potential for growth. Yet the city's tightly drawn boundary and surrounding Green Belt leave little space for new jobs or homes. This mismatch between demand and supply pushes activity into less connected locations, weakens agglomeration benefits, and risks deterring investment.

3.44 Expanding the boundary through a GO authority would directly address this constraint. It would unlock land in the right places – near employment clusters and supported by public transport – allowing firms to expand close to the knowledge core while residents gain access to affordable homes and jobs. In doing so, GO aligns business needs with Oxford's functional economic geography and creates the conditions for sustained, inclusive growth.

3.45 Expanding the boundary of Oxford through GO would meet the requirements of businesses set out above. It would create economic centres adjacent to the city, served by public transport infrastructure which reduces the likelihood people would need to commute by car, increases the space utilised for development rather than car parking, and limits the growth in road traffic. The anticipated Cowley Branch Line reopening for passenger services is a further driver of connection and growth between housing, skills and business location. The proximity for knowledge exchange, supply chains and supporting services creates an innovation ecosystem that can accelerate inclusive economic growth.

3.46 A GO unitary would also simplify governance. At present, development on the city's edge requires navigating multiple councils, causing delay and uncertainty. Consolidating planning, housing and transport in a single authority would provide clarity for investors and enable more strategic, joined-up decisions about where and how Oxford grows.

3.47 Expanding Oxford's boundary would also unlock space for growth within the high-productivity zone, enabling:

- Concentration of growth around existing employment hubs;
- Denser, more efficient patterns of activity, reducing travel distances and infrastructure costs; and
- Formation of new clusters, reinforcing Oxford's global competitiveness.

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

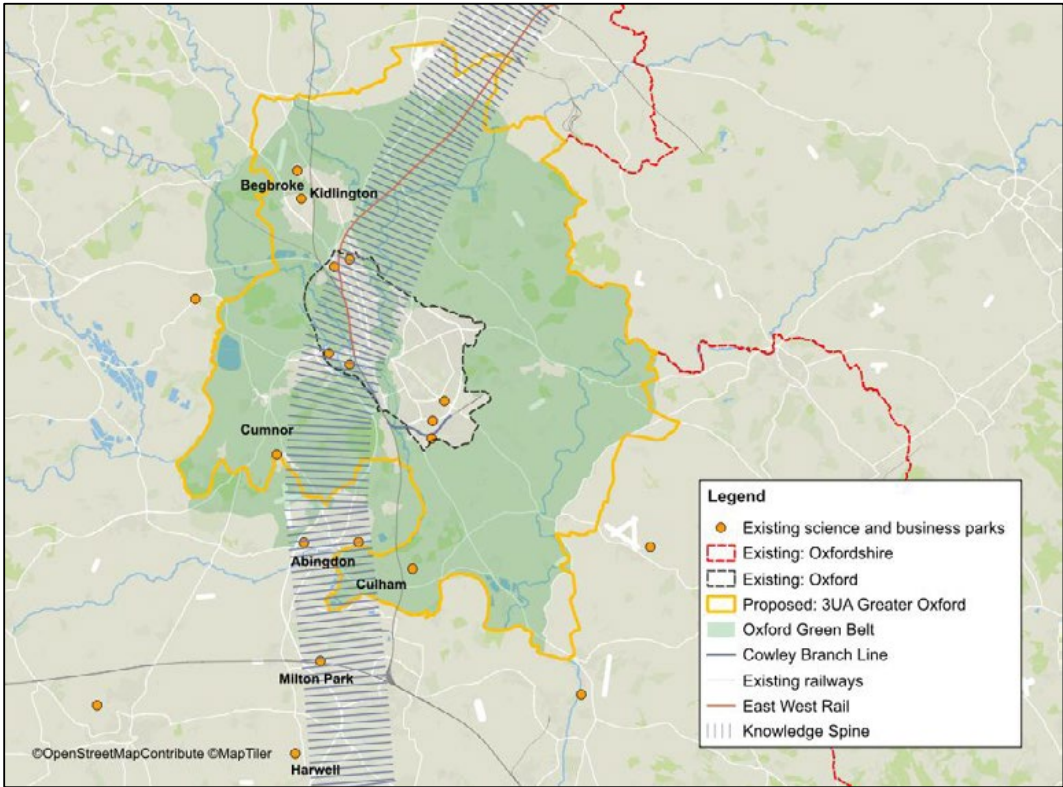


3.48 A GO authority would also bring wider strategic benefits. It will:

	Allow integrated planning of housing, employment, and infrastructure at the right spatial scale, ensuring that growth is coordinated rather than fragmented across multiple districts.
	Enable the strategic release of Green Belt land. Even with provision for around 40,000 new homes, the vast majority of Oxford's 135 square miles of Green Belt would remain untouched. Key ecological assets such as Shotover and Otmoor would continue to be safeguarded under statutory protection. ⁴⁹
	Incorporate Oxford and its surrounding communities into a coherent economic geography, recognising functional ties through commuting, research networks, and leisure. This is covered in more detail in the 'A coherent economic geography' section below.
	Better ensure Oxford's priorities are both represented and delivered. It would provide a powerful voice at the Mayoral Strategic Authority table, while also providing the local capacity to align housing, skills, and economic development with major infrastructure investments such as East–West Rail. This combination of influence and delivery would help Oxford translate its global strengths into sustained, inclusive growth.

3.49 The map below sets out current science and business parks, and the Oxford Green Belt boundary. This highlights the potential for strategically located, high impact developments near existing key employment site on the outskirts of Oxford City's current boundary.

Figure 3 – Proposed GO boundary with identified sites, Oxford Green Belt, exiting and proposed railways and the Oxfordshire knowledge spine



⁴⁹ Natural England, 2025. Designated Sites View



What Greater Oxford unlocks

3.50	<p>By uniting Oxford's functional economic area into a single authority, GO would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Release significant additional commercial, office and R&D space, with many likely to be located near key employment sites to maximise agglomeration opportunities• Accelerate housing delivery, including affordable and social homes, easing pressures on recruitment and retention in key sectors.• Generate new (not displaced) growth by capturing investment that would otherwise go to competing UK or international clusters.
3.51	<p>The scale of the opportunity is clear. A report produced by the Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster Board in 2024 highlighted that unlocking potential growth across Oxford the region could make it the 'crown jewel' of European science and innovation and could benefit the UK by as much as £50 billion per year by 2030.⁵⁰</p>
3.52	<p>GO would also help to tackle Oxford's affordability crisis. Oxford faces one of the most severe housing affordability challenges in the UK, with average house prices more than eleven times average earnings.⁵¹ Under-supply undermines the ability of employers to retain staff, particularly in the NHS and key sectors such as academia and tech.⁵² The University of Oxford has recognised the challenge, proposing 2,000 homes for postdoctoral researchers to ease rent pressures.⁵³</p>
3.53	<p>The growth potential of the 3UA options including GO and the alternative LGR options is considered in a later section of this report.</p>

⁵⁰ Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster Board, 2024
⁵¹ ONS, 2025. Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2024
⁵² Oxfordshire Country Council, 2024. Agenda item: Oxford University Hospitals NHSFT People Plan
⁵³ Oxford City Council, 2017. University Housing Needs



4.

A coherent economic geography

Framing Oxford’s economic geography

- 4.1
- A Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) describes the real geography of daily life. This area illustrates where people live, work, shop, and access services. These areas rarely align with administrative boundaries.
- 4.2
- Defining a FEMA is not an exact science. Rather than fix a single line, we identify a ‘best-fit’ area using a small set of complementary indicators at fine spatial scales (e.g. commuting flows, journey times, service and housing market linkages).⁵⁴
- 4.3
- Volterra’s methodology draws on multiple datasets to capture the most important economic linkages, enabling us to describe Oxford’s functional geography. For this study, indicators are mapped to demonstrate that the city’s economic and social reach extends beyond the current administrative boundary. The resulting evidence shows that the proposed GO boundary would be a better fit with the true scale of the city’s economy and service catchments. Taken together, they point to a GO that better matches the city’s true economic and service catchments than existing arrangements.
- Identifying Oxford City’s coherent economic geography
- 30-minute drive time
- 4.4
- A 30-minute contour mirrors typical UK commuting behaviour and is widely used in accessibility analysis. The DfT reports an average commuting time of around 29 minutes in Great Britain, therefore mapping a 30-minute drive time captures the ‘everyday sphere’ of most workers and aligns with DfT Journey Time Statistics for assessing access to employment.⁵⁵
- 45-minute cycle
- 4.5
- Oxford has unusually high active travel commuting (17.2% cycling in Oxford compared to 6.7% across Oxfordshire and 3.1% nationally), so a broader cycling catchment is appropriate.⁵⁶ This is consistent with Kicak Cycling and Walking Infrastructure technical guidance to plan strategic, longer corridors between key origins and destinations.⁵⁷ This window fairly represents realistic upper-bound commute cycles in a cycling city like Oxford.
- 50 + commuters to Oxford City
- 4.6
- Census data on where people travel for work helps us see which areas have a real daily connection to Oxford. By focusing on places that send at least 50 workers into the city, we cut out very small, irregular flows and highlight those with a genuine link.⁵⁸ Given the size of a typical local area (5,000–15,000 residents), this threshold usually means at least 1% of the workforce is tied to Oxford.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ This provides a clear, evidence-based way of showing the city’s wider pull on surrounding communities.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024. Planning practice guidance: Plan-making

⁵⁵ DfT, 2024. Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2023 Domestic Travel

⁵⁶ OCC, 2022. Travel to work in Oxford Census 2021

⁵⁷ DfT, 2017. Planning local cycling and walking networks

⁵⁸ ONS, 2023. Origin-destination data explorer: Census 2021

⁵⁹ UK Data Service, 2021. An introduction to 2021 Census geography datasets

⁶⁰ NB: Middle layer super output areas usually comprise between 5,000 to 15,000 residents.



100+ commuters to Oxford City

4.7

Looking at places with at least 100 commuters gives us a way to identify the strongest links to Oxford City typically 2% to 3% of a local area's workforce.⁶¹ This higher threshold makes it possible to distinguish between areas with moderate connections and those with especially strong commuting ties. By mapping these flows, we can clearly show the corridors where Oxford's influence is most concentrated, reinforcing the case for recognising a wider 'Greater Oxford' economic area.

Grouping of key Oxford business parks

4.8

Oxford's major business and science parks form the backbone of its high-value economy, but they do not all play the same role. Parks such as Milton Park and Culham to the south are heavily integrated into the Science Vale Cluster, an area that has been deliberately planned and branded as a complementary hub of science and technology activity, sitting just beyond Oxford's boundary but linked closely through supply chains and commuting flows. By contrast, parks like Begbroke to the north of Oxford (just outside the city boundary) are more directly connected to the city's own research base and institutions, particularly the University of Oxford.⁶² Mapping these parks together demonstrates the breadth of Oxford's innovation ecosystem, while also showing how parts of it, particularly to the south, extend into a distinct but connected science value cluster.

Density heatmap of commercial office properties

4.9

Clusters are commonly understood as concentrations of related firms and institutions within a defined geography.⁶³ Such concentrations shape competitiveness by raising the productivity of firms, supporting innovation, and encouraging the creation of new businesses. Patterns of clustering can be observed through the density and distribution of commercial premises.

Synthesising Oxford City's coherent economic geography

4.10

The overlay of commuting flows, travel times, and the distribution of major employment nodes provides a powerful visualisation of Oxford's wider economic footprint. Taken together, these map layers reveal a distinct concentration of activity within the proposed GO area. The density of commuting patterns, employment hubs, and innovation clusters clearly demonstrates how economic networks extend across current administrative boundaries, underlining the argument that governance and planning should reflect this functional geography rather than the more limited city boundary.

⁶¹ UK Data Service, 2021. An introduction to 2021 Census geography datasets

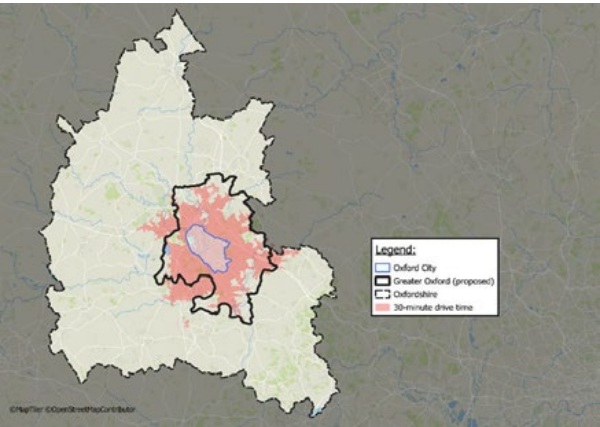
⁶² OxLEP. No date. The Oxfordshire Innovation Ecosystem

⁶³ Porter, 1998. Clusters and the new economics of competition

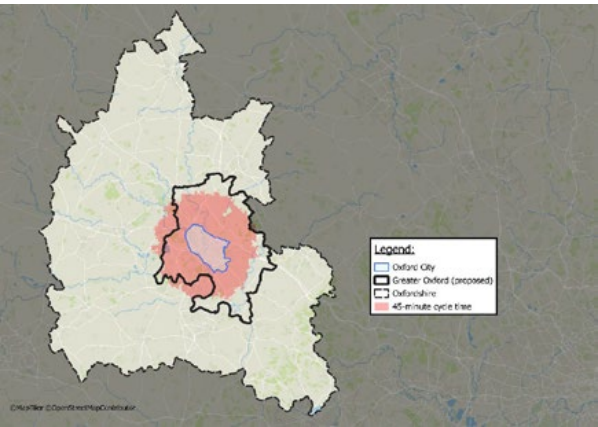


Oxford's coherent economic geography – all maps

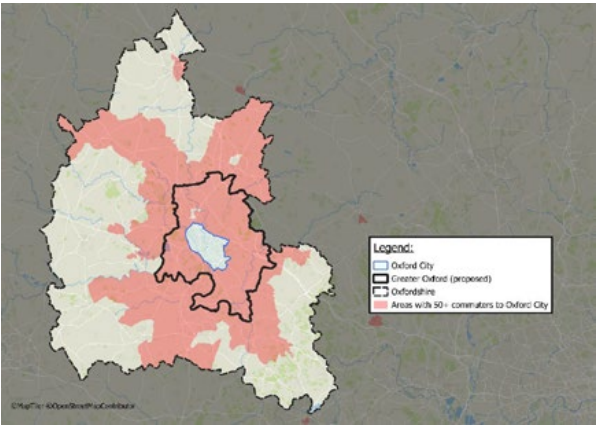
30-minute drive time radius from Oxford City



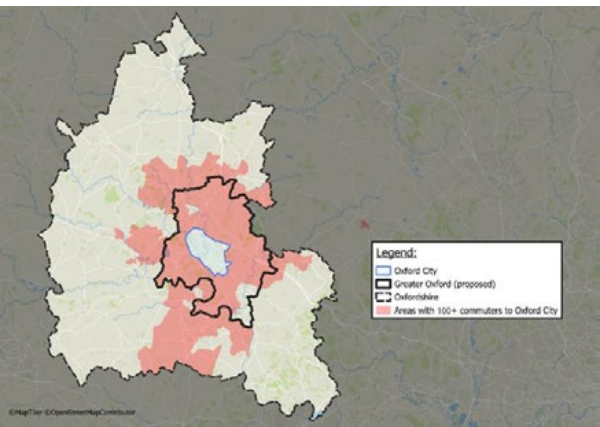
45-minute cycle time radius from Oxford City



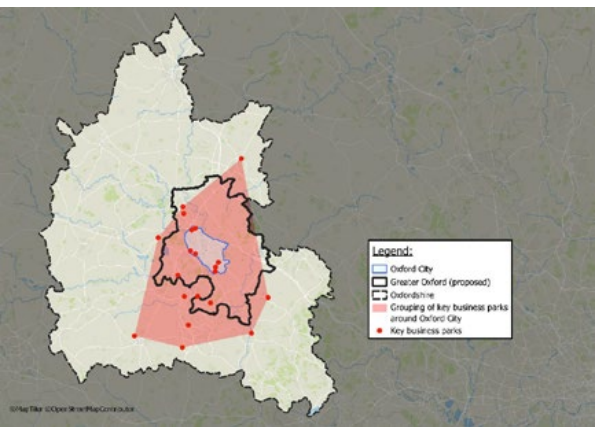
Areas with 50+ commuters to Oxford City



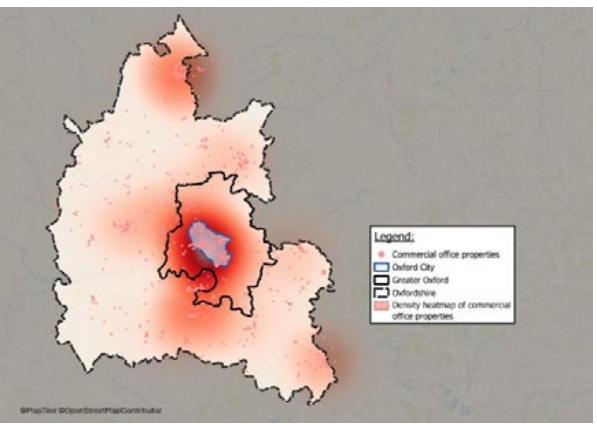
Areas with 100+ commuters to Oxford City



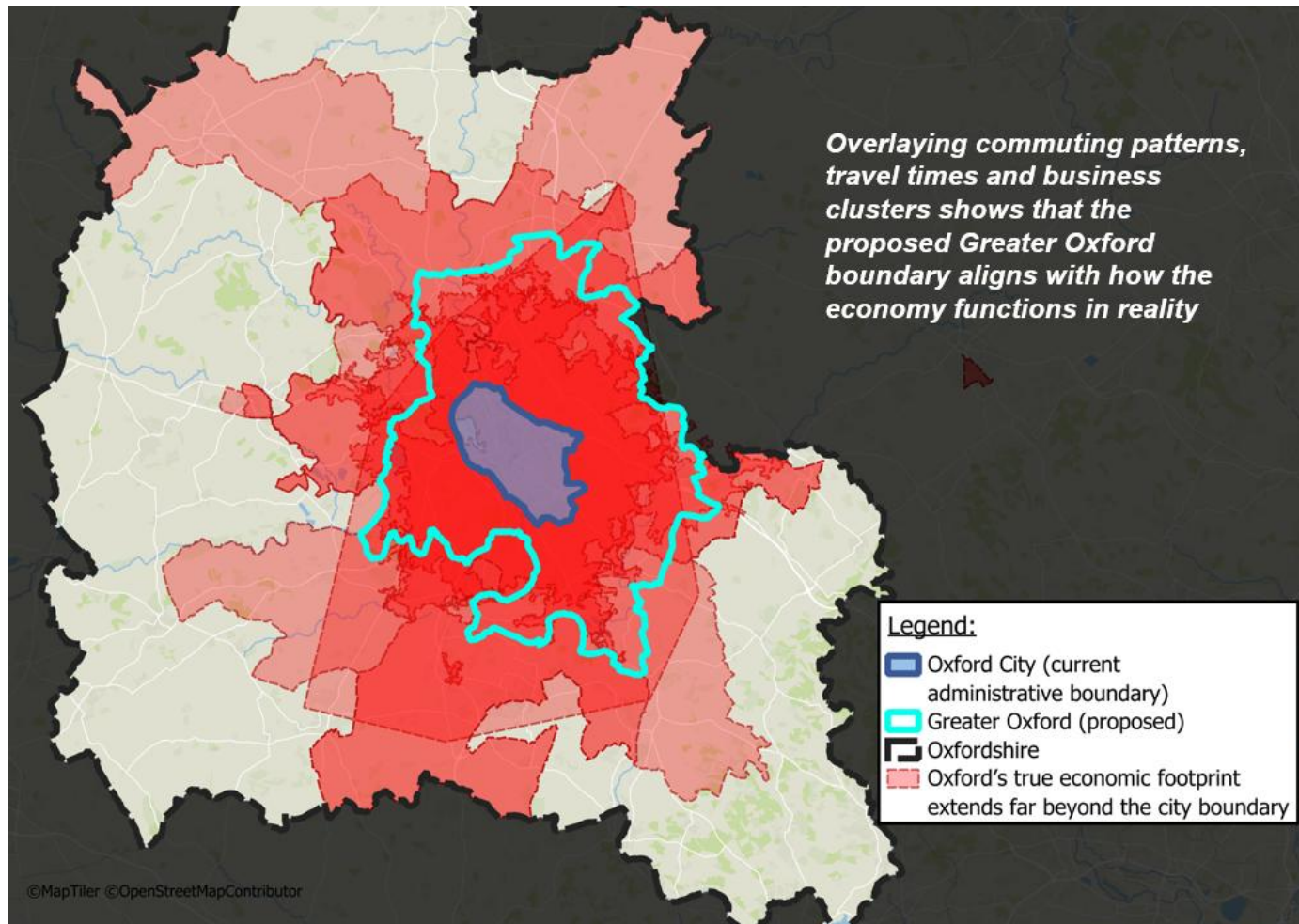
Grouping of key business parks in and outside Oxford City



Density heatmap of commercial office properties



Commuting, travel times and business clusters show that Greater Oxford aligns with how the economy actually works





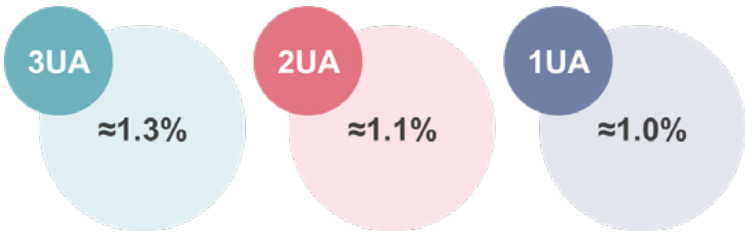
5. Employment growth potential under different options

5.1 This section considers the employment growth potential of each LGR option. Forecast growth rates are informed by a wide range of evidence, including historic economic performance, growth forecasts from other studies under comparable scenarios, and bottom-up analysis of development potential. Qualitative judgement has also been applied where appropriate to reflect factors likely to change as a result of boundary adjustments, such as shifts in strategic focus, governance priorities, the ability to unlock key development sites and the likelihood of green belt release. The key rationales for each growth rate are transparently presented in this section.

5.2 This section sets out likely employment growth rates for each proposal, including the evidence and justification underpinning them. It then outlines the potential associated housing need, including the methodology used and resulting alignment with the SM housing targets for each area and other relevant targets (the Interim Plan Update to MHCLG and the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal).

5.3 **Figure 4** shows a summary of each proposal's employment growth forecasts.

Figure 4 – Summary of forecast annual employment growth rates under the three options



Employment growth forecasts

3UA

5.4 The 3UA model delivers the highest county-wide average employment growth at around **1.3% per year**. Each authority focuses on its distinct economic strengths: GO achieves ≈1.5% by unlocking R&D capacity through selective green belt release and strategic sites such as Culham, maximising agglomeration benefits; Northern Oxfordshire reaches 1.3% through mid-tech, tourism, and agricultural opportunities; and Ridgeway achieves 1.2% via coordinated expansion of Harwell, Milton and Didcot. **Table 2** summarises the evidence and justifications for these forecasts.

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation**Table 2 – 3UA employment growth forecast**

1. Greater Oxford	≈ 1.5%
<p>Evidence for growth rate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment forecasts under current constraints indicate growth of around 0.6%–1.2% per year, showing the baseline trajectory if Oxford's capacity challenges remain.^{64,65,66} • Historic employment growth performance demonstrates Oxford's ability to deliver much stronger growth: average annual growth of ~1.3% between 2009 and 2019, with peaks of up to 4.7% during 2013–2016 when favourable conditions aligned.⁶⁷ • Bottom-up analysis of identified sites from previous 5th Studio work indicates that ~1.1%–1.3% is achievable.⁶⁸ • There is further upside potential if the Ox-Cam super-cluster investments materialise, which could support growth of 2.3% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), as set out as the transformational scenario in the Public First study. However, this has been excluded from the central case to keep the ~1.5% forecast realistic and evidence-based.^{69,70} <p>Justification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strategic Green Belt release:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxford's green belt covers almost 135 square miles, providing substantial scope for carefully managed development without undermining its primary function. While it is estimated that the Green Belt could theoretically accommodate up to 3 million homes, the delivery of around 40,000 new homes would affect only a very small proportion of this land.⁷¹ The vast majority of the Green Belt would remain intact, and key ecological assets such as Shotover and Otmoor, both protected through statutory environmental designations, would continue to be safeguarded.⁷² • Previous analysis (work undertaken by 5th Studio) identified a number of strategically located sites immediately outside the city boundary which are well suited for Green Belt release. These sites are capable of accommodating large development plots that cannot be delivered within Oxford's historic urban form. • Green Belt release in these locations would therefore enable the delivery of major new employment sites of a scale and type likely not achievable under the alternative 1UA or 2UA scenarios, doing so in a way that balances both housing growth and environmental protection. This would represent a step-change in Oxford's growth trajectory, creating the space required to attract and retain globally competitive firms and reinforcing Oxford's position as an internationally significant economic hub. • <i>Agglomeration and clustering benefits:</i> As set out in the Why Greater Oxford? section above, new sites allow firms to cluster more closely, intensifying spillovers, collaboration, and 	

⁶⁴ Oxfordshire Growth Board, 2021. Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment

⁶⁵ Oxford City Council, 2022. Oxford City Employment Land Needs Assessment

⁶⁶ Cherwell District and Oxford City Councils, 2022. Housing and Economic Needs Assessment

⁶⁷ Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), 2024. Historic employment estimates

⁶⁸ The levels of economic growth associated with the 'additional growth' identified sites is calculated using the following assumptions:

- For each site, 50% of the land is developable and 50% of that land is likely to come forward as development.
- These sites are delivered with a ratio of 1.07 jobs per home (the implied rate from the "transformational scenario" in the OGNA).
- The developable land is developed on a basis of 80 dwellings per hectare and 241 jobs per hectare.
- Final growth for the area is calculated based on existing growth + additional growth + growth due to the Cowley Branch Line (8,000 jobs).

⁶⁹ Public First, 2024. [Oxford - Cambridge Scenario Modelling](#)

⁷⁰ Because the additional 450,000 jobs are projected across the entire OxCam Arc, we have estimated Oxford City's share by calculating its proportion of total employment across the relevant local authorities (Milton Keynes, Oxford, Vale of White Horse, Cambridge, and South Cambridgeshire)

⁷¹ Oxford City Council, 2025. Greater Oxford: One council. Local decisions. A better place to live.

⁷² Natural England, 2025. Designated Sites View

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

innovation. Instead of growth being dispersed, it would be concentrated around existing high-value employment centres, creating productivity uplift.⁷³

- *Occupier preferences:* As set out above, high-tech and research firms strongly prefer locations near Oxford's academic and talent base. They favour edge-of-Oxford campus sites with space and access to skilled labour.
- *Unlocking constrained potential:* Oxford's spinouts and high-growth firms are currently struggling to scale within constrained land supply.⁷⁴ Providing space through land release enables these firms to expand locally, keeping them within the county and catalysing a step-change in growth.

The central ~1.5% forecast is grounded in Oxford's historic performance, strengthened by site-level analysis, and made achievable through selective release of land that removes key growth constraints.

2. Northern Oxfordshire Council**≈ 1.3%****Evidence for growth rate:**

- Forecast employment growth rates:
 - West Oxfordshire, from West Oxfordshire Annual Monitoring Report (2020): 1.6% per year.⁷⁵
 - Cherwell, from Cherwell Employment Needs Assessment (2024): 1.1% per year.⁷⁶
- Taking a weighted blend of these produces a central estimate of ~1.3%.

Justification:

- *Local growth hubs:* Growth is driven by market-town economies with distinct specialisms (rather than just spillover from Oxford):
 - Bicester has strengths in automotive and logistics. Bicester Motion, spanning a 444-acre estate, has emerged as a major centre for future mobility innovation and global automotive excellence. It hosts over 50 specialist businesses spanning classic car preservation to advanced mobility technologies.⁷⁷
 - Banbury is a market town in Cherwell district with a diverse economy focused on manufacturing, logistics, distribution, and services. Recent development includes new state-of-the-art logistics facilities, such as the Frontier Park industrial development.⁷⁸
 - Salt Cross Garden Village proposes around 2,200 new homes and a major science and technology park. Plans include a substantial 40 ha science and tech park adjacent to a park-and-ride facility, supporting jobs and business growth.⁷⁹
- *Additional economic assets:*
 - Witney and Carterton (supported by RAF Brize Norton) add further employment capacity. Witney is the largest economic centre in West Oxfordshire, with strong distribution-related activity and lower-than-average unemployment.⁸⁰
 - Upper Heyford (Heyford Park) is being developed as a mixed-use settlement with thousands of new homes, employment space, community facilities, and commercial infrastructure. Employment at the village centre currently supports over 1,200 jobs, with potential to add around 1,500 more by 2031.⁸¹

⁷³ Peak Economics and Møreforsking, 2023. Agglomeration and transport appraisal: new developments and research directions

⁷⁴ Savills, 2020. Competing requirements for land

⁷⁵ Based on an increase of 10,600 jobs between 2018 and 2031 in [West Ox annual monitoring report](#). [The May 2025 Draft Preferred Policy Options Paper](#) sets out that AECOM is drafting an ENA

⁷⁶ Growth of 20,100 jobs from the [Interim update Note - Cherwell Employment Needs Assessment update](#) that informed the employment land need in the proposed local plan: [Cherwell Local Plan Review](#), using BRES 2021 total Cherwell employment as the base

⁷⁷ Oxford Calling, 2024. Spotlight on Bicester: Bicester in the Driving Seat

⁷⁸ Ralph Davis. Ralph Davis Unveils New Banbury Facility: A Strategic Step Forward

⁷⁹ West Oxfordshire District Council, 2025. Salt Cross information page

⁸⁰ Lichfields, 2025. Carterton-Witney-Oxford Rail Corridor Economic Appraisal

⁸¹ Bidwells, 2025. The Village Centre At Heyford Park, Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX25 5HD

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation

- *Economic composition:* The area is characterised by a strong mid-tech sector, supported by agriculture and tourism, ensuring steady and resilient growth even without Oxford's global cluster effects.^{82,83}
- *Strategic independence:* Growth in Northern Oxfordshire is forecast to be lower than GO due to absence of Oxford's unique global cluster. However, GO's self-contained expansion removes overspill pressure, allowing Northern Oxfordshire to strategically invest in its own market-town and industrial strengths.

Combining robust local evidence sources provides a consistent growth forecast of ~1.3%. This figure positions Northern Oxfordshire slightly below GO's 1.5% forecast, reflecting a stable yet locally-driven growth path.

3. Ridgeway Council**≈ 1.2%****Evidence for growth rate:**

- Forecast employment growth rates:
 - South Oxfordshire, from South and Vale ELNA, 2024: 0.4% per year⁸⁴
 - Vale of White Horse, from South and Vale ELNA, 2024: 0.7% per year⁸⁵
 - West Berkshire, from West Berkshire Employment Land Review, 2020: 0.7% per year⁸⁶
- However, a unified authority supports coordinated Science Vale strategy at Harwell and Milton and there is growth potential at Didcot, so growth potential is higher than it has been historically, with a lower ceiling than Oxford-centric GO scenario.

Justification:

- *Science Vale cluster:* Harwell Campus and Milton Park form the backbone of the Ridgeway economy, with further expansion already planned.
 - The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus spans 700 acres, hosts over 240 public and private organisations, and employs over 6,000 people across areas such as space, clean energy, life sciences, and quantum computing.⁸⁷
 - Moderna is establishing an Innovation and Technology Centre (MITC) within Harwell's Health Tech cluster, bringing mRNA R&D and manufacturing capability.⁸⁸
 - Located within Science Vale UK, Milton Park is the largest single ownership innovation community in the UK, over 250 organisations in sectors including life sciences, energy, space, and supporting technologies.⁸⁹
- *Didcot Garden Town:* Major housing and employment growth will cement Didcot's role as a hub for science-sector jobs, adding scale to the cluster. Didcot Garden Town is projected to deliver ~15,000 homes and ~20,000 jobs by 2031, raising growth above historic levels.⁹⁰
- *Other growth sources:* Wallingford, Wantage/Grove, and Newbury add further market-town and service-driven growth, ensuring economic diversity. Part of Vodafone headquarters in West Berkshire also set to be partially turned into a science park.⁹¹
- *Strategic coordination:* A unified authority supports coordinated Science Vale strategy at Harwell and Milton, and there is growth potential at Didcot, so growth potential is higher than historic level. A single authority enables more effective planning across these growth centres. Nonetheless, the lack of Oxford's world-class university cluster and its associated agglomeration

⁸² Experience Oxfordshire, 2024. Economic Impact of Tourism – Headline Figures- Cherwell

⁸³ West Oxfordshire District Council, 2023. The Economic Impact of West Oxfordshire's Visitor Economy

⁸⁴ Based on whole economy forecast job growth from 2021-2041. Table 8-2 from [South and Vale ELNA 2024](#), using BRES 2021 total South Oxfordshire employment as the base. Potential alternative based on the office and industrial growth that informed employment land need is 0.6% per annum.

⁸⁵ Based on whole economy forecast job growth from 2021-2041. Table 8-2 from [South and Vale ELNA 2024](#) using BRES 2021 total Vale of White Horse employment as the base. Potential alternative based on the office and industrial growth that informed employment land need is 0.9% per annum.

⁸⁶ Based on whole economy Experian forecast job growth from 2020-2030 from the [West Berkshire Employment Land Review](#)

⁸⁷ Harwell, 2024. Harwell Campus Named The UK's Most Successful Science Campus

⁸⁸ Merit, 2024. Moderna Selects Harwell Science Campus To Develop Innovation and Technology Centre in the UK

⁸⁹ Milton Park, 2025. Website

⁹⁰ Aecom, 2021. Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure Fund Programme

⁹¹ BBC, 2025. Part of Vodafone site to become science park

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



effects means Ridgeway is capped at ~1.2% growth rather than reaching Greater Oxford's ~1.5%.

A central growth forecast of ~1.2% reflects a step-up from historic performance due to Science Vale and Didcot, while acknowledging that growth remains below Greater Oxford's due to lower levels of agglomeration and global reach.

Table 3 – 3UA absolute growth in employment, with the annual increase being the average over the period to 2042

Geography	2023 employment	Annual growth rate	Annual increase
Greater Oxford	183,400	1.5%	3,150
Northern Oxfordshire	112,400	1.3%	1,600
Ridgeway	209,400	1.2%	2,850
Total 3UA	505,100	1.3%	7,600

2UA

5.5

The 2UA model is forecast to deliver county-wide employment growth of around 1.1% per annum. The Oxford and Shires UA's combination of Oxford's urban priorities with more rural districts slightly dilutes its planning focus and creates challenges for delivering green belt sites, which can be politically sensitive. Ridgeway's growth also moderates to 1.1% (down from 1.2% in the 3UA model) as, under this governance, it must accommodate additional housing for Oxford commuters alongside pursuing its Science Vale and Didcot-led growth strategy. Table 4 sets out the evidence, data sources, and justifications underpinning each forecast scenario.

Table 4 – 2UA employment growth forecast

1. Oxford and Shires Council	≈ 1.1%
Evidence for growth rate: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Forecast employment growth rates:<ul style="list-style-type: none">West Oxfordshire, from West Oxfordshire Annual Monitoring Report (2020): 1.6% per year.⁹²Cherwell, from Cherwell Employment Needs Assessment (2024): 1.1% per year.⁹³Oxford City, from The Oxford City ELNA Interim Report (2025): 1.0% per year⁹⁴A weighted average of these district-level figures produces ~1.1% per year.This is also consistent with Oxfordshire's past long-term average of ~1.0% per year. Justification: <ul style="list-style-type: none">There are clear growth opportunities particularly around Oxford and Bicester/Banbury, as set out in 3UA the Northern Oxfordshire justification above.However there is also:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Fragmentation of priorities:</i> Combining Oxford's high-growth, innovation-driven economy with more rural districts spreads governance attention across divergent needs, reducing Oxford's economic momentum. Research on local government fragmentation highlights that fragmented systems, especially those combining different urban and rural needs, may struggle with coherent economic strategy and can negatively impact growth momentum.⁹⁵	

⁹² Based on an increase of 10,600 jobs between 2018 and 2031 in [West Ox annual monitoring report](#). The May 2025 [Draft Preferred Policy Options Paper](#) sets out that AECOM is drafting an ENA

⁹³ Growth of 20,100 jobs from the [Interim update Note - Cherwell Employment Needs Assessment update](#) that informed the employment land need in the proposed local plan: [Cherwell Local Plan Review](#), using BRES 2021 total Cherwell employment as the base

⁹⁴ Rapleys, 2025. Oxford City – Employment Land Needs Assessment Interim [report](#): Appendix B, Job numbers Change 2024-42

⁹⁵ Northern Illinois University, 2019. Local Government Fragmentation: What Do We Know?



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



- *Coordination barriers:* Delivering politically sensitive green belt sites becomes more challenging in a larger, mixed authority. As a result, no comprehensive review or release is assumed under this scenario.⁹⁶
- *Fewer economic clusters:* In a mixed authority that combines Oxford with surrounding more rural districts, governance would be required to balance divergent priorities. This disperses attention and resources, making it harder to sustain a focused economic strategy. As a result, opportunities to develop concentrated, high-performing clusters are diluted, and the benefits of agglomeration are weakened.

A blended growth forecast of around 1.1% is supported by local evidence but constrained by the governance model. While some consolidation of councils would deliver efficiencies, the absence of a clear strategic focus holds back stronger performance. Growth would be steady but below the 3UA GO scenario. The Oxford and Shire Council is expected to underperform slightly compared with Northern Oxfordshire under the 3UA option.

2. Ridgeway Council**≈ 1.1%****Evidence for growth rate:**

- Forecast is slightly reduced compared with ~1.2% in the 3UA Ridgeway Council model.
- This reflects the additional requirement for Ridgeway to accommodate commuter housing from Oxford, diverting resources away from Science Vale-led expansion.

Justification:

- *Retained strengths:* As set out in the 3UA Ridgeway Council justification, Science Vale and Didcot remain growth drivers, but resources are more stretched as Ridgeway will need to absorb some of Oxford's commuter housing demand, diverting capacity away from investment in Science Vale-led sectors and diluting the region's innovation-focused growth potential.
- *Diluted economic mission:* A governance model that balances Oxford's overspill with local development needs hinders a clear focus on transformative, high-value science and innovation outcomes, unlike the strategic clarity a dedicated Oxford unitary could deliver.
- *Greenbelt release constraint:* No assumption of comprehensive green belt review or release further limits capacity for high-value economic activity.

Growth moderates to ~1.1%, reflecting a split between innovation-led expansion and supporting commuter housing pressures.

Table 5 – 2UA absolute growth in employment, with the annual increase being the average over the period to 2042

Geography	2023 employment	Annual growth rate	Annual increase
Oxford and Shires	264,700	1.1%	3,350
Ridgeway	240,400	1.1%	3,000
Total 2UA	505,100	1.1%	6,350

1UA

5.6

The single county-wide UA is forecast to perform the slowest at around 1.0% per year, as competing urban, suburban, and rural priorities make it harder to pursue bold, place-specific strategies. This is likely to result in steady but incremental growth rather than transformative change. There is little difference between 2UA and 1UA in terms of growth potential. However, 2UA is expected to grow slightly faster, supported by more coherent priorities, stronger place branding, and a more explicitly pro-growth stance adopted by West Berkshire. **Table 6** explains this in more detail.

⁹⁶ CPRE, 2025. "Greater Oxford" Proposal Threatens the Green Belt and Ignores the Bigger Picture

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation**Table 6 – 1UA employment growth forecast**

1. Oxfordshire Council	≈ 1.0%
<p>Evidence for growth rate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggregated historical employment growth of the five districts amounts to ~1.0% growth per year. Historic county growth between 2010 and 2022 was ~17%, equating to ~1.1% annually.⁹⁷ The forecast of ~1.0% reflects incremental growth but falling short of the higher potential associated with more focused, multi-unitary models. <p>Justification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Broad scope:</i> A single county-wide authority must balance Oxford's role as a global innovation hub with the needs of its rural districts and market towns. This wide scope inevitably spreads resources and investment more thinly, diluting the focus required to maximise Oxford's high-value cluster opportunities. Research on local government consolidation highlights how broad governance mandates can reduce policy clarity and weaken growth impacts.⁹⁸ <i>Conservative land-use approach:</i> Rural interests may limit green belt releases, diluting emphasis on high-value Oxford-centric developments and Science Vale. Political realities suggest that rural interests would likely resist significant green belt release. As set out above, CPRE Oxfordshire have already raised concerns that broader unitary structures risk Green Belt erosion and undermine planning integrity.⁹⁹ Without this, Oxford's most productive growth opportunities cannot be unlocked. <i>Lack of clear economic mission:</i> Unlike a dedicated GO or Ridgeway authority, a single county-wide unitary lacks a strong, singular champion for Oxford's global science and innovation mission. Without this, transformational initiatives risk being deprioritised in favour of consensus-driven compromises. <i>Stable but unambitious:</i> Growth is steady but incremental, with lower private-sector confidence due to diluted vision. A more ambitious single unitary could deliver stronger growth if backed by political consensus and strategic land-use/infrastructure investment, however this is not considered a realistic central case. <p>A ~1.0% annual growth rate reflects both Oxfordshire's historic performance and current planned trajectories, but does not capture the step-change potential that could arise from governance reform or strategic Green Belt release.</p> <p>There is little difference between 2UA and 1UA in terms of growth potential. However, 2UA is expected to grow slightly faster, supported by more coherent priorities, stronger place branding, and a more explicitly pro-growth stance adopted by West Berkshire.</p>	

Table 7 – 1UA absolute growth in employment, with the annual increase being the average over the period to 2042

Geography	2023 employment	Annual growth rate	Annual increase
Total 1UA	399,500	1.0%	4,150
+ West Berkshire	105,600	1.0%	1,100
Total 1UA (+ West Berkshire)	505,100	1.0%	5,250

⁹⁷ Oxfordshire County Council, 2025. Appendix 2 Option 1 [A New Council - Our Oxfordshire](#)⁹⁸ Northern Illinois University, 2019. Local Government Fragmentation: What Do We Know?⁹⁹ CPRE, 2025. "Greater Oxford" Proposal Threatens the Green Belt and Ignores the Bigger Picture



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



Housing implications

5.7

To ensure the employment growth forecasts are realistically deliverable, this section considers the housing need generated by the projected job growth. Aligning homes with jobs is essential: without sufficient housing, labour shortages and longer commuting patterns could constrain economic performance. The approach follows best practice set out in the Planning Practice Guidance and uses established employment need assessment methodology to translate job growth into housing requirements. The process is as follows:

- Change in economically active residents to meet job forecasts** – taking the projected job growth for each geography, and adjusting for:
 - Commuting patterns** – apply commuting ratios to estimate how many of these workers would live in the same district.
 - Double jobbing** – convert total jobs into the number of workers.
 - Unemployment adjustment** – account for local unemployment rates.
- Population** – convert the change in economically active residents to population, based on the ratio of the total population per economically active resident.
- Homes** – convert the population into the number of homes required, based on household size.
- Home vacancy rate** – adjust to allow for a proportion of unoccupied homes.
- Homes-to-jobs ratio** – calculate the relationship between employment growth and housing.

5.8

Where possible, we based our calculations on the assumptions and inputs specific to each unitary authority within each proposal. This ensures that the resulting ratios are as accurate as possible and are not distorted by county-wide averages. The detailed assumptions for each geography are set out in **Appendix A**.

5.9

The table below presents results for two scenarios:

- Scenario 1** reflects current commuting patterns, with some assumptions incorporated for the Greater Oxford scenario and existing patterns applied to all other geographies.
- Scenario 2** assumes a 1:1 commuting ratio, representing a hypothetical situation in which each council delivers all housing needed to meet its employment growth within its own boundary. This scenario recognises that Oxford's current, tightly drawn boundary constrains its capacity to deliver sufficient land for growth, resulting in unmet need being exported to neighbouring unitary authorities. Under an expanded GO boundary, significant additional sites could be brought forward, enabling the city to meet its full housing need and allowing neighbouring authorities to retain full control over their own development and housing provision. While achieving a 1:1 ratio in practice is unlikely even with the expanded boundary, this provides an illustrative example of the potential scale of change.

Table 8 – Homes-to-jobs ratios and resulting annual homes

Geography	Scenario 1: taking into account current commuting ratios		Scenario 2: assuming a commuting ratio of 1:1	
	Ratio	Associated annual homes	Ratio	Associated annual homes
Greater Oxford	0.5	1,750	0.7	2,300
Northern Oxfordshire	0.8	1,300	0.8	1,150
Ridgeway	0.8	2,250	0.7	2,200
Total 3UA		5,300		5,650
Oxford and Shires	0.7	2,250	0.7	2,500
Ridgway	0.8	2,450	0.8	2,400
Total 2UA		4,700		4,900
1UA - Oxfordshire	0.7	3,000	0.7	3,050

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



Comparison to the Standard Method and other targets

5.10 This section compares the housing estimates derived from jobs growth with the Standard Method (SM) annual housing need figures and other relevant targets (the Interim Plan Update to MHCLG and the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal). The purpose is to assess whether the housing numbers from the jobs growth approach align with what is planned and deliverable.

5.11 This helps to confirm that economic and housing growth are aligned, and the economic growth does not imply a level of growth above that GO, or any other area, can realistically deliver. It also ensures that minimal unmet housing need from higher growth scenarios would be passed on to other areas beyond the capacity-tested baseline.

Comparison to the SM

5.12 The table below compares the job-based housing numbers set out above with the SM housing targets. For the 3UA proposal, where boundaries have changed, the SM housing target has been reapportioned based on the population distribution in the new geographies.

Table 9 – Comparison of job-based homes figures to SM housing need (annual, dwellings per year)

	Scenario 1: taking into account commuting ratios			Scenario 2: assuming a commuting ratio of 1:1		
Geography	Annual homes from jobs	SM annual homes	Difference	Annual homes from jobs	SM annual homes	Difference
Greater Oxford	1,750	1,800	-50	2,300	1,800	+500
Northern Oxfordshire	1,300	1,700	-400	1,150	1,700	-550
Ridgeway	2,250	2,800	-550	2,200	2,800	-600
Total 3UA	5,300	6,300	-1,000	5,650	6,300	-650
Oxford and Shires	2,250	3,100	-850	2,500	3,100	-600
Ridgeway	2,450	3,200	-750	2,400	3,200	-800
Total 2UA	4,700	6,300	-1,600	4,900	6,300	-1,400
1UA - Oxfordshire	3,000	5,250	-2,250	3,050	5,250	-2,200

5.13 Across all geographies except Scenario 2 3UA GO, the housing estimates derived from jobs growth are below the SM figures. This suggests the plan would meet at least the SM baseline, unless exceptional circumstances justify a lower figure.

5.14 In the 3UA GO 1:1 commuting scenario, the jobs-based method estimates 500 homes above the SM. This uplift above SM can be justified in principle where it:

- i. remains within deliverable capacity;
- ii. is tied to the economic strategy (R&D-led growth near the universities/hospitals), and;
- iii. is supported by infrastructure phasing (e.g. Cowley Line).

5.15 We therefore treat the higher GO figure as deliverable, but will not adopt a requirement above SM unless the evidence for exceptional circumstances and infrastructure is secured.



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



5.16 Scenario 1 is considered the more realistic outcome, although a bit on the lower side, while Scenario 2 represents an illustrative maximum. As set out in **Appendix A**, Scenario 1 assumes that there is a net inflow of commuters into GO, albeit lower than the current Oxford City net inflow. A perfect 1:1 commuting ratio is unlikely, so monitoring and management mechanisms will be used to ensure sufficient housing supply is maintained.

5.17 Across all options we apply a capacity guardrail: the adopted baseline requirement will not exceed deliverable capacity, and any upside beyond SM is treated as contingent on site and infrastructure delivery. A monitor-and-manage clause could be applied to trigger a review if observed jobs growth sustainably out-turns the baseline (e.g., >10% for three consecutive years).

5.18 It is both logical and reassuring that the jobs-derived method produces lower housing need figures on the whole than the SM. This is because the SM takes account of wider factors – such as historic unmet need, affordability pressures, demographic change (including an ageing population), and migration trends – which this more simple homes-to-jobs approach does not capture.

Comparison to other targets

OCC 3UA plan

5.19 It is estimated that under the 3UA proposal, around 40,000 homes could be delivered within GO over 15 years. The basis for this estimate is the homes associated with additional sites identified in the 5th Studio work undertaken earlier this year. Over 15 years, this equates to 2,650 homes per year. The table below compares the two scenarios of job-based home growth against this figure.

Table 10 – Comparison of job-based homes figures to additional homes set out by the OCC 3UA plan

Greater Oxford	Scenario 1: taking into account commuting ratios			Scenario 2: assuming a commuting ratio of 1:1		
	Annual homes from jobs	OCC 3UA plan	Difference	Annual homes from jobs	OCC 3UA plan	Difference
1 year	1,750	2,650	-900	2,300	2,650	-350
15 years	26,250	40,000	-13,750	34,500	40,000	-5,500

5.20 The results suggest that the proposed jobs growth is likely to be deliverable in practice.

Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal

5.21 Although slightly dated another relevant target is the delivery of 100,000 homes between 2011 and 2031, as set out in the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal. 100,000 homes over 20 years equates to 5,000 additional homes per year. The table below compares the two scenarios of job-based home growth against this figure. This is a historic, Oxfordshire-only commitment (i.e. excludes West Berkshire) and covers a different period; we therefore use it for context only.

Table 11 – Comparison of job-based homes figures to additional homes set out in Oxfordshire Growth Board

Geography	Scenario 1: taking into account commuting ratios			Scenario 2: assuming a commuting ratio of 1:1		
	Annual homes from jobs	Growth Board	Difference	Annual homes from jobs	Growth Board	Difference
3UA	5,300	5,000	+300	5,650	5,000	+650
2UA	4,700	5,000	-300	4,900	5,000	-100
1UA	3,000	5,000	-2,000	3,050	5,000	-1,950

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



5.22 The jobs-based housing estimates are broadly comparable to the Growth Board’s county-wide target. For the 3UA proposal, the estimates are higher, which is expected as both cover a larger area than the county boundary by including West Berkshire. West Berkshire accounts for around 600 homes under scenario 1 and 650 homes under scenario 2. Adjusting for this would bring the 3UA proposal either below (scenario 1) or in line (scenario 2) with the target. This uplift is reasonable, as the 5,000-per-annum target does not account for the additional housing capacity that could be unlocked through green belt release within the extended GO boundary.

5.23 For the 2UA and 1UA proposals, the jobs-based totals are below this target, reinforcing that these proposals would not require these areas to deliver more homes than can realistically be achieved.

Public First Study: transformational scenario

5.24 The Oxford Transformational scenario assumes 2.3% annual growth, as set out in the 2024 Public First Study. This is based on creating an additional 450,000 jobs across the Oxford–Cambridge Arc over 25 years.

5.25 The table below compares the housing demand generated under two job-based growth scenarios. The 2.3% growth rate results in significantly higher associated housing demand, which is likely to be undeliverable in practice.

Table 12 – Comparing annual homes derived from jobs growth of 1.5% to 2.3%

Geography	Scenario 1: taking into account commuting ratios			Scenario 2: assuming a commuting ratio of 1:1		
	1.5% growth	2.3% growth	Difference	1.5% growth	2.3% growth	Difference
Greater Oxford	1,750	3,800	-2,050	2,300	3,800	-1,500



6. Additionality, agglomeration and productivity uplift

6.1 This section sets out how the growth potential described above translates into additional economic value for Greater Oxford. It covers both the direct GVA associated with extra jobs and the further productivity gains that arise when more of those jobs are concentrated in and around Oxford. The analysis compares outcomes across the 3UA, 2UA and 1UA models and builds on the evidence presented earlier on how density raises productivity in knowledge intensive places (**paragraph 3.5**).

Approach

6.2 Projected jobs are converted into direct GVA based on the following methodology:

- **2023 baseline:** For each geography within each proposal, GVA per head is fixed at the 2023 level as the starting point for the projections.
- **2024-2050 projection:**
 - **1UA proposal:**
 - GVA per head is assumed to grow each year at the historic national rate of real GVA per head growth over the period 2000–2023. This provides a benchmark against which the higher-growth scenarios can be assessed.
 - **2UA and 3UA proposals:**
 - For existing jobs, GVA per head also grows at the historic national rate. This reflects a deliberately conservative assumption that the productivity of current employment is unlikely to be significantly enhanced by structural change.
 - For new jobs, GVA per head grows at an elevated rate relative to the 1UA proposal in each geography. This uplift captures the expectation that new jobs anticipated under these proposal will be more productive and is calibrated to align with the ratios used to justify the employment growth assumptions.

6.3 This approach ensures that the projected relationship between employment growth and GVA growth remains consistent with historic patterns of economic performance. It also reflects the nature of job growth anticipated under the proposals, for example the expansion of lab space and related high-value sectors, as outlined in the employment growth section above. The resulting impacts for each proposal are presented in the table below.

6.4 An agglomeration multiplier is then applied to direct GVA that reflects how concentrated employment is relative to a fixed benchmark. The multiplier is derived from a relative density index using core and non-core shares and travel time decay weights, combined with an elasticity drawn from the literature. Agglomeration effects are measured incrementally against the base year, and the cumulative benefits up to 2050 are then discounted back to today at 3.5%.

6.5 Full steps, parameters and sensitivity tests are set out in the **Technical Appendix**.

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



Results

6.6

The results of the methodology set out in the Technical Appendix are set out in Table 13.

Table 13 – Additionality, agglomeration and productivity outputs across the three options

	3UA	2UA	1UA*
Baseline (2023)			
Employment (2023)	505,100	505,100	505,100
Annual GVA (2023) (£bn)	£38.4	£38.4	£38.4
Growth (2023-2050)			
Employment growth (2023-2050)	218,000	180,000	153,000
Forecast impacts (2050)			
Annual direct GVA (2050) (£bn)	£64.1	£59.3	£56.8
Annual GVA from agglomeration (2050) (£bn)	£0.83	£0.12	£0.00
Annual total GVA (2050) (£bn)	£64.9	£59.5	£56.8
Agglomeration benefit per worker (2050, relative to 2023)	£1,083	£155	£0.00
NPV over 27-year period (2023-2050), total additional from 2023			
Direct GVA (£bn)	£163.5	£141.2	£125.7
GVA from agglomeration (£bn)	£5.3	£0.8	£0.0
Total GVA NPV (£bn)	£168.8	£142.0	£125.7
NPV over 27-year period (2023-2050), relative to reference case			
Direct GVA relative to reference case (£bn)	£37.8	£15.5	Reference case
GVA from agglomeration relative to reference case (£bn)	£5.3	£0.8	Reference case
Total GVA NPV relative to reference case (£bn)	£43.1	£16.3	Reference case
Employment and GVA % (growth 2023-2050)			
Employment CAGR (AAGR)¹⁰⁰	1.3% (1.6%)	1.1% (1.3%)	1.0% (1.1%)
GVA CAGR (AAGR)	1.9% (2.6%)	1.6% (2.0%)	1.5% (1.8%)

**West Berkshire is added to the 1UA option with historic rates of employment growth continuing to 2050 to allow for direct comparison with the 3UA and 2UA options

¹⁰⁰ CAGR: Compound annual growth rate, AAGR: Average annual growth rate

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation**What this means****Overview**

6.7 By 2050, the 3UA proposal supports approximately 38,000 more jobs than the 2UA proposal and 65,000 more than the 1UA proposal, on a like-for-like geographic basis. Translating employment into economic output, annual GVA in the 3UA proposal rises from £38.4 billion in 2023 to £64.1 billion in 2050. This represents a CAGR of 1.9% over the period, equivalent to an AAGR of 2.6%. These growth rates are higher than those expected under either the 1UA or 2UA proposals, however they are still realistic based on a historical comparison. For example, from 2000-2023, real GVA in Oxfordshire grew by a CAGR of 1.3% and an average AAGR of 1.5%.

6.8 Proximity adds further value. Beyond scale, 3UA places a larger share of jobs where agglomeration works hardest, close to Oxford's research base and innovation spine. The density effect is modest each year but accumulates: by 2050 it is worth around £1,080 per worker, and on a discounted basis to 2050 the agglomeration component alone is £5.3 billion for 3UA. This uplift is calculated relative to a fixed 1UA 2023 benchmark and uses a conservative elasticity to avoid overstating spillovers.

Growth constrained by land supply and housing capacity

6.9 The 3UA forecasts of 1.5% employment growth and 1.9% real GVA growth are constrained not by a lack of demand, but by the limited availability of land for development. Oxford's capacity for expansion is determined by the need to balance economic growth with housing delivery. Even with the release of some Green Belt land, this would not be sufficient to meet the full scale of demand. As set out in **paragraph 5.25** of the housing implications section, an annual employment growth rate of 2.3% would generate housing demand that is likely to be undeliverable in practice.

6.10 Oxford's historic town centre further restricts opportunities for further development despite strong market demand. Taken together, these factors mean that the city's growth trajectory is defined less by economic potential than by the practical limitations of land supply and housing capacity.

6.11 In addition, realising this growth envisaged under 3UA will depend on timely investment in enabling infrastructure to unlock sites and capacity, as signalled by the recent Cowley Branch Line announcement.¹⁰¹

Oxfordshire's role with the Thames Valley

6.12 Metro Dynamics has recently set out an ambition for the Thames Valley Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) to achieve 2.3% real GVA growth, reflecting a return to pre-Covid levels. This is derived from the CAGR achieved across the MSA between 2013 and 2018. Oxfordshire's historically lower employment growth rate of around 1% has constrained the wider region's overall performance. Under the 3UA model, Oxfordshire could deliver 1.9% real GVA growth, which would make a meaningful contribution towards the Thames Valley's 2.3% growth objective.

6.13 Oxfordshire is unlikely to be able to exceed this level of growth given the land and housing balance constraints described above. By contrast, the 1UA and 2UA models, which represent lower growth scenarios, would therefore have a more modest impact on wider regional performance.

Why the gains are additional

6.14 The measured uplift is not simply activity moved around within the county. It arises from higher effective density relative to a fixed baseline, from better alignment with the location preferences of high value and mobile firms, and from reduced delivery friction across planning, land, transport, housing, and skills that enables timely capacity close to Oxford. Without that capacity and coordination, a portion of investment would leak to other UK or international clusters or arrive later and smaller.

¹⁰¹ Oxford City Council, 2025. Reopening the Cowley Branch Line for passengers



Fiscal implications

6.15 Applying the historic relationship that roughly 30 to 40 per cent of GVA accrues as public receipts provides an order of magnitude view of the Exchequer impact. On this basis, by 2050 annual tax receipts are approximately £1.6 – £2.2 billion higher under 3UA than 2UA, and approximately £2.4 – £3.2 billion higher than 1UA.

Overall value

6.16 On a discounted basis to 2050, the combined benefits of jobs driven GVA and proximity under 3UA total around £169 billion, around £27 billion above 2UA, making 3UA the strongest platform for higher value growth, sooner, and in the places where it counts.



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



7. Inclusive growth

OCC's track record

7.1 Oxford City Council has a strong record on inclusive growth. For example:

- The Economic Strategy 2022–32 sets “a new standard for economic inclusion”.
- The Council established and promotes the Oxford Living Wage (£13.16/hour in 2025/26) with an employer accreditation scheme.
- It co-leads the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP), which launched an Inclusive Economy Charter to embed social value across employers.
- OCC was an early adopter of the OIEP Charter and has delivered 35 of 39 pledges, including actions on apprenticeships, inclusive recruitment and local procurement.¹⁰²

7.2 Draft Policy E3 (Oxford Local Plan 2042) requires major developments to submit a Community Employment & Procurement Plan (CEPP) showing how they will support an inclusive local economy and deliver social value.

7.3 Expected CEPP commitments include:

- Secure local construction jobs.
- Provide construction apprenticeships/training for local residents.
- Engage schools and colleges.
- Secure local jobs in the operational/end-user phase.
- Procure locally for ongoing supply chains.
- Pay the Oxford Living Wage to all employees (except apprentices).
- Use contractors that commit to the Oxford Living Wage / appropriate social clauses.
- Source construction materials locally where feasible.
- Provide affordable workspace.

Enhancing inclusivity through scale and governance

7.4 The 3UA proposal is projected to deliver greater economic growth than the 2UA or 1UA models. A larger economy means more residents benefit in absolute terms, as increased activity generates additional jobs, skills development opportunities, and investment across the region.

7.5 As an illustrative example, the Oxfordshire CEP target of 5% of construction jobs as apprenticeships implies that, by 2050, the annual number of apprenticeships supported by each proposal would be:

- **3UA:** 3,170
- **2UA:** 2,935
- **1UA:** 2,183¹⁰³

7.6 In addition, GO would enable delivery of mixed-tenure housing in well-connected locations, supported by improved public transport linking villages and employment clusters. This integration of housing and transport would create a more balanced and inclusive growth model, expanding economic capacity while also improving affordability, accessibility, and quality of life.

7.7 Planned growth at the city's edge, under a single authority, can be particularly inclusive. Coordinating transport, housing, and labour-market strategies ensures high-value clusters remain accessible to a wide pool of workers. As new science and technology jobs emerge, they stimulate demand for a broad range of supporting roles in services, supply chains, and construction. With GO, this growth would be managed to

¹⁰² <https://www.oiep.org.uk/>

¹⁰³ It is worth noting that the 1UA geography does not include West Berkshire, whereas the others (2UA and 3UA) do. If apprenticeships from West Berkshire were included, the total would amount to 2,785, still significantly less than the 3UA proposal.



spread opportunity across different skill levels and communities, maximising the benefits of Oxford’s global economic strengths.

Delivering more affordable housing

7.8

The additional housing delivered under GO would include a significant proportion of council and affordable homes, in line with Oxford’s Local Plan 2036 requirement that developments of over ten dwellings provide 40% social housing and 10% other affordable housing. Based on the projected 1,750–2,650 additional homes per year under the GO scenario (**Table 10**), this equates to around 700–1,060 new social homes and 175–265 affordable homes annually.

7.9

This scale of provision would make a material impact on Oxford’s acute affordability challenges, where average house prices are more than 11 times local salaries. It would also directly support the 3,500 plus households currently on the City Council’s waiting list, who face average waits of over five years.¹⁰⁴ Over just a few years, the delivery of thousands of council homes would help reduce poverty and transform lives.

Expanding access to community facilities

7.10

At present, only city residents can access the Council’s community offer, including:

- **Free swimming** for under-17s at Barton, Ferry, Leys and Hinksey pools;
- **Free youth clubs and activities** (e.g., the Oxford Youth Ambition programme);
- **Discounted leisure membership** for residents on qualifying benefits (including carers and people on disability benefits).

7.11

Under GO, all Greater Oxford residents, including those in Berinsfield, Botley, Kennington, Kidlington and Wheatley, would be eligible for the offer.

7.12

The ambition is also to extend provision to Abbey Sports Centre (Berinsfield), Kidlington & Gosford Leisure Centre, and Park Sports Centre (Wheatley).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Alan Boswell Group, 2025. Oxford residents waiting over five years for social housing
¹⁰⁵ Oxford City Council, 2025. Greater Oxford: One council. Local decisions. A better place to live.



8. Appendix A

Assumptions underlying the homes-to-jobs ratio

8.1

The tables below set out the assumptions and sources for each step in determining the jobs-to-homes ratio. For steps 1–4, the inputs are averaged across the unitary authorities included in each proposal (for the 2UA and 1UA options). For the 3UA option, the inputs are averaged across the LSOAs within the new unitary authority geographies.

Table 14 – Assumptions underlying each step of the jobs to homes ratio

	3UA			2UA		1UA
	GO	Northern Oxfordshire	Ridgeway	Oxford and Shires	Ridgeway	Oxfordshire
1. Change in economically active residents						
<i>Commuting ratio (for scenario 1 only)¹⁰⁶</i>	1.3	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0
<i>Double jobbing (% of those who have two-jobs)¹⁰⁷</i>	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%
<i>Unemployment rate¹⁰⁸</i>	3.7%	3.2%	2.9%	3.5%	3.0%	3.3%
2. Population						
<i>Population / economically active resident¹⁰⁹</i>	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.9
3. Homes						
<i>Population / average household size¹¹⁰</i>	2.7	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.5
4. Home vacancy rate¹¹¹	5.3%	5.0%	4.1%	5.1%	4.1%	4.8%
5. Homes-to-jobs ratio	S1: 0.5 S2: 0.7	S1: 0.8 S2: 0.7	S1: 0.8 S2: 0.8	S1: 0.7 S2: 0.7	S1: 0.8 S2: 0.7	S1: 0.7 S2: 0.7

¹⁰⁶ ONS, 2025. 2011 Census WU03UK - Location of usual residence and place of work by method of travel to work. The commuting ratio has been apportioned based on the origins of employees who would fall within the new GO boundary; 70% of the Oxford City ratio, 10% Cherwell, 8% South Oxfordshire, 9% Vale of White Horse, 4% West Oxfordshire

¹⁰⁷ 4.5% across Oxfordshire based on 2019 OGNA

¹⁰⁸ ONS, 2025. 2021 Census TS066 - Economic activity status; ONS, 2025. 2021 Census Population estimates - small area (2021 based) by single year of age - England and Wales

¹⁰⁹ ONS, 2025. 2021 Census TS066 - Economic activity status; ONS, 2025. 2021 Census Population estimates - small area (2021 based) by single year of age - England and Wales

¹¹⁰ ONS, 2025. 2021 Census TS041 - Number of Households; 2021 Census Population estimates - small area (2021 based) by single year of age - England and Wales

¹¹¹ ONS, 2025. Average of 2011 and 2021 Census Figure 1: Percentage of unoccupied dwellings for local authorities in England and Wales, 2021. [average taken as some 2021 data skewed by covid]

9.

Appendix B

Technical appendix – additionality and agglomeration methodology

9.1

This appendix explains, step by step, how we estimate the economic impact of the three administrative options for Oxfordshire. We project jobs to 2050, convert jobs into direct GVA (in constant prices), and then add a small productivity uplift for agglomeration (i.e., the benefit of having jobs closer together around Oxford).

9.2

The model works by combining:

- Job growth by area (compounded to 2050);
- GVA per job, historical and current (held in 2023 prices) per area;
- Where jobs land (a simple core vs non-core weighting and a gentle distance-decay);
- A relative density index (how concentrated employment is around Oxford vs a fixed baseline); and
- A standard elasticity to convert small density differences into small productivity uplifts.
- We calculate the incremental agglomeration uplift year by year and (separately) a discounted total.

Step 1: Employment growth projections

9.3

The analysis begins with 2023 employment figures for each of the options under consideration.¹¹² Assumed compound annual growth rates (CAGRs), varying by area under each option to reflect differences in expected growth trajectories, are applied to project future employment levels through to 2050. These respective CAGRs by area within each option are as follows¹¹³:

- **3UA option:** Greater Oxford (1.5%), North Oxfordshire (1.3%), Ridgeway (1.2%);
 - **2UA option:** Oxford and the Shires (1.1%), Ridgeway (1.1%); and
 - **1UA option:** (1.0%).

Table 15 – Overall employment growth across options

Option	Current employment (2023 including West Berkshire)	Employment growth (2023-2050)
3UA	505,100	218,000
2UA	505,100	180,000
1UA + West Berkshire ¹¹⁴	505,100	153,000

9.4

By 2050, the three options (3UA, 2UA, and 1 UA) show different absolute levels of employment, reflecting their growth assumptions. All options start from the same quantum of overall employment in 2023.

This step provides the baseline job projections that underpin the direct gross value added (GVA) uplift and contribute to later agglomeration calculations.

¹¹² Note: For new areas under each of the options that do not comply with existing local authority boundaries, we have deployed a best fit approach using existing lower-super-output-area boundaries.

¹¹³ Note: These CAGR percentages are justified in the main report.

¹¹⁴ Note: West Berkshire is added to the 1UA option with historic rates of employment growth continuing to 2050 to allow for direct comparison with the 3UA and 2UA options, which both include West Berkshire.



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



Step 2: Direct GVA

9.5

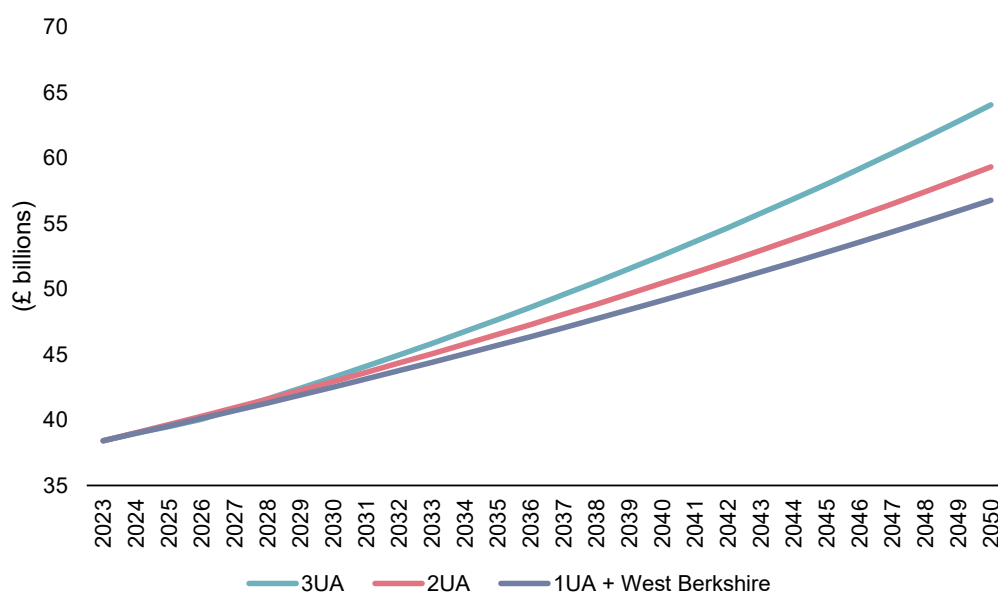
Projected jobs are converted into direct GVA based on the following methodology:

- **2023 baseline:** For each geography within each proposal, GVA per head is fixed at the 2023 level as the starting point for the projections.
- **2024-2050 projection:**
 - **1UA proposal:**
 - GVA per head is assumed to grow each year at the historic national rate of real GVA per head growth over the period 2000–2023. This provides a benchmark against which the higher-growth scenarios can be assessed.
 - **2UA and 3UA proposals:**
 - For existing jobs, GVA per head also grows at the historic national rate. This reflects a deliberately conservative assumption that the productivity of current employment is unlikely to be significantly enhanced by structural change.
 - For new jobs, GVA per head grows at an elevated rate relative to the 1UA proposal in each geography. This uplift captures the higher productivity anticipated under these proposals and is calibrated to align with the ratios used to justify the employment growth assumptions.

9.6

This approach ensures that the projected relationship between employment growth and GVA growth remains consistent with historic patterns of economic performance. It also reflects the nature of job growth anticipated under the proposals, for example the expansion of lab space and related high-value sectors, as outlined in the employment growth section above

Figure 5 – Direct GVA (£ billions) uplift generated by employment growth across options



9.7

Alongside the GVA estimates, the analysis also considers the potential impact on tax revenues accruing to government. Evidence from national statistics comparing GVA and public sector receipts between 1997 and 2017 suggests that between 30% and 40% of GVA is collected as tax revenues by HM Treasury.¹¹⁵ This occurs through a combination of business rates, VAT, corporate tax, and income tax. To capture this, the direct GVA uplift is multiplied by factors of 30% and 40%, providing a range for the possible fiscal benefit associated with the additional employment in each option.

¹¹⁵ ONS, 2025. Gross value added; ONS, 2025. Public sector finances



Step 3: Core vs non-core assumptions

9.8 Agglomeration benefits depend on job location as well as job numbers. Because exact distributions of future employment are unknown, a simple ‘core vs non-core’ structure is used:

- **Core jobs** are located in Greater Oxford and assumed to benefit fully from spillover effects; and
- **Non-core jobs** are located further afield and assumed to benefit only partially.

9.9 This UA-level approach is deliberately simple. We recognise that several non-core locations (e.g. Harwell, Milton, Begbroke, Culham) are tightly linked to Oxford’s economy. We therefore do not heavily discount non-core jobs; instead we apply a moderate reduction so that jobs outside the city still contribute meaningfully to agglomeration.

9.10 Justification for this is as follows:

- **Productivity rises with access to economic mass.** Standard transport/economic appraisal links productivity to ‘effective density’ (employment mass weighted by generalised travel costs), which captures proximity to large, active labour and supplier markets. This is the basis of DfT’s TAG guidance on wider economic impacts.¹¹⁶
- **Spillovers are highly local.** Evidence shows agglomeration effects attenuate quickly with distance/travel time; nearby activity has the strongest impact (from within-building scales up to neighbourhoods).¹¹⁷
- **Stronger for knowledge-intensive/services.** Meta-analysis finds positive, material elasticities of productivity to density, with larger effects in services and knowledge sectors—consistent with Oxford’s economic mix.¹¹⁸

9.11 Greater Oxford accounts for 34% of R&D jobs in the study area, underscoring that the highest economic density and thus the strongest agglomeration potential sits in and around the city.

9.12 The core fraction is the proportion of each area’s jobs that are treated as within the Oxford ‘core’, meaning they behave as though they are directly connected to the Oxford core economy. This is essentially a weighting device that bridges the gap between actual geography (which is coarse at the UA level) and the finer geography at which spillovers operate. The core fractions utilised are as follows:

Area	Core fraction	Justification
3UA		
Greater Oxford	1.00 (fully core)	Oxford has the largest concentration of jobs in the county, especially in universities, hospitals, and knowledge-based services. These jobs are at the heart of Oxford’s economy, so we treat them as fully part of the core.
North Oxfordshire	0.00 (fully non-core)	This area is more connected to Banbury and the M40 corridor than to Oxford. It sits outside the main Oxford labour market, so we give it no core weighting.
Ridgeway	0.15	The Science Vale area (Harwell, Milton Park, Culham) has nationally significant R&D activity that is strongly linked to Oxford. We give it a small positive fraction to capture these links, without overstating them.
2UA		
Oxford and the Shires	0.55	When Oxford is grouped with nearby areas, commuting patterns suggest roughly half of jobs are strongly tied into Oxford’s economy and half are not. A 0.55 weighting captures this ‘mixed’ picture fairly.
Ridgeway	0.15	As above.

¹¹⁶ Department for Transport, 2018. TAG UNIT A2.1 Wider Economic Impacts Appraisal
¹¹⁷ Rosenthal, 2020. How Close Is Close? The Spatial Reach of Agglomeration Economies
¹¹⁸ Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

**Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation**

Area	Core fraction	Justification
1 UA		
Oxfordshire-wide average	0.35	Taking the county as a whole, we apply a weighting that is above Oxford City's share (to reflect Science Vale's importance), but still below 0.50, since northern Oxfordshire remains outside the main Oxford labour market.

9.13

These fractions are applied to the projected job totals in each geography to calculate an overall weighted core share. This represents the effective proportion of employment assumed to be close enough to Oxford to access the full strength of spillovers.

9.14

The use of core fractions ensures the analysis remains sensitive to how employment is spatially distributed, even when only broad area-level job forecasts are available. By combining these fractions with distance decay weights, the framework captures the reality that not all jobs contribute equally to agglomeration effects.

Step 4: Time-based decay weights

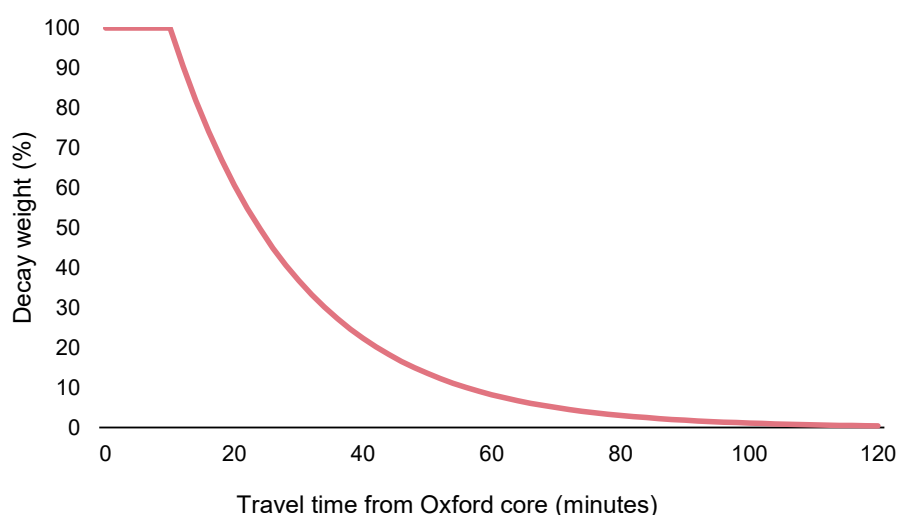
9.15

A critical element of the agglomeration framework is recognising that the productivity benefits of clustering fall away with distance from the economic core. The evidence is clear that spillovers fade with travel time. While jobs in Oxford itself (the core) experience the full extent of spillovers, jobs located further away capture only a proportion of this effect. The analysis incorporates this distance decay by applying travel time-based decay weights.

9.16

The rule applied is that jobs located within 10-minutes of Oxford are assumed to receive the full agglomeration benefit, so their weight is set at 1. Beyond this, the benefit declines smoothly following an exponential curve. For each minute of travel time beyond the 10-minute threshold, the weight is reduced by around 5% on a compounding basis.¹¹⁹ This means that the further a job is from the Oxford core, the less it contributes to the overall agglomeration effect, but the decline is gradual rather than abrupt.

Figure 6 – Visual example of decay weight being applied to travel time



¹¹⁹ KPMG, 2016. Effective Density: Measures of effective density for estimating agglomeration elasticities in Australian cities; Douglas, 2016. Wider Economic Benefits – When and if they should be used in evaluation of transport projects

Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



9.17 The travel times used for each geography option were:

Area	Travel time	Justification
3UA		
Greater Oxford	15 minutes	Reflects the short journeys typical within a city. ¹²⁰ GIS travel time analysis, backed up by DfT statistics, shows people in urban areas usually get to services much faster than in rural areas. ¹²¹ This also reflects the benefits of having many jobs and services close together in city settings.
North Oxfordshire	40 minutes	Represents more rural parts of the county, where typical travel times are longer. ¹²² This figure is above the national average, reflecting that people here are further from key centres and services.
Ridgeway	40 minutes	Similar to North Oxfordshire, this area is rural and further from Oxford. Longer travel times are in line with patterns for rural communities and show weaker direct access to the city. ¹²³
2UA		
Oxford and the Shires	27 minutes	This is a middle-ground figure. It sits between the short city average and the national average (29 minutes). ¹²⁴ GIS analysis shows this matches areas that are partly urban and partly rural. ¹²⁵
Ridgeway	40 minutes	As above.
1UA		
Oxfordshire-wide average	32 minutes	This reflects the county as a whole. It is just above the national commuting average (29 minutes), which makes sense given Oxfordshire combines a compact city with large rural areas. ¹²⁶

9.18 Applying the exponential decay function produced the following decay weights:

- **3UA option:** Greater Oxford (0.78), North Oxfordshire (0.22), Ridgeway (0.22);
- **2UA option:** Oxford and the Shires (0.43), Ridgeway (0.22); and
- **1UA option:** (0.33).

These weights adjust the contribution of each area’s jobs to the agglomeration effect. For example, on average, a new job in Greater Oxford counts as almost four times as influential as a job in Ridgeway, because it is closer to the Oxford core.

¹²⁰ Rosenthal, 2020. How Close Is Close? The Spatial Reach of Agglomeration Economies
¹²¹ DfT, 2021. Journey time statistics, England: 2019; TravelTime API
¹²² DfT, 2021. Journey time statistics, England: 2019
¹²³ DfT, 2021. Journey time statistics, England: 2019
¹²⁴ DfT, 2024. Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2023 Domestic Travel
¹²⁵ TravelTime API
¹²⁶ DfT, 2024. Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2023 Domestic Travel



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



Step 5: Relative density

9.19

Once decay weights and core fractions have been applied to each area, the next stage of the analysis is to calculate relative density. This provides a single index that captures how concentrated jobs are around Oxford after adjusting for both geography and distance. This reflects the idea that:

- Jobs in the Oxford core contribute fully to agglomeration benefits; and
- Jobs further away still contribute, but less strongly, depending on their decay weight.

9.20

The calculation process involves three steps

- **Step 1 – Core weighted jobs:** For each option, the number of jobs is multiplied by the product of its core fraction and decay weight (δ) (see paragraph 9.13). This generates the effective number of “core-equivalent” jobs in that area.
 - **Example:** Ridgeway has a core fraction of 0.15 and a decay weight of 0.22. Each job in Ridgeway therefore contributes $0.15 \times 0.22 = 0.033$ ‘core-equivalent jobs.’
- **Step 2 – Overall core share:** The total number of core-equivalent jobs across all UAs is divided by the total jobs in the option. This produces the jobs-weighted core share (s_{core}).
 - **Example:** if an option has 700,000 jobs in total and 280,000 of these are core-equivalent, then $s_{core} = 0.40$.
- **Step 3 – Relative density index:** The final relative density is then a blend of the decay weight baseline and the core share. Conceptually, relative density increases as a larger share of jobs are located in or near Oxford. This is achieved through the formula:

$$\text{Relative density} = \delta + (1 - \delta) \times s_{core}$$

- **Example:** If $\delta = 0.70$ and $s_{core} = 0.40$, then relative density = $0.70 + 0.30 \times 0.40 = 0.82$.

The relative density step is crucial because it translates differences in job geography into a productivity effect. Without it, the model would simply scale GVA with job growth, ignoring where those jobs are located.

Step 6: Benchmarking against a reference case

9.21

Relative density values only become meaningful when compared to a baseline. To provide this benchmark, the 1UA option in the base year (2023) was used as the reference case. This reflects the existing configuration of Oxfordshire before any boundary changes are applied, ensuring the analysis is anchored in the ‘real world’ geography at the start of the period. Using 2023 as the base year avoids artificially inflating or deflating the agglomeration effect, since all options share the same employment quantum in that year.

9.22

The choice of the 1UA 2023 reference case also captures Oxfordshire’s distinctive spatial pattern: employment is relatively concentrated around Oxford compared with many other county areas, but remains more dispersed than in major metropolitan cores. This makes it a balanced benchmark, dense enough to reflect Oxfordshire’s current economic strengths, yet not so extreme as to overstate the gains from reconfiguration. By comparing subsequent options against this baseline, the model isolates the incremental effect of boundary choices rather than general trends in employment growth or density.

9.23

Each option’s relative density in later years is expressed as a ratio against this baseline. If the ratio is above 1, the option is denser than the baseline and therefore expected to deliver stronger spillover effects. If it is below 1, the option is more dispersed and weaker in terms of agglomeration.



- **Example:** In 2050, the 3UA option generates a relative density of around 0.83, compared to the reference value of 0.57 in the 2023 baseline. The RD ratio is therefore 1.46, which when raised to the elasticity (0.08) gives a small but meaningful productivity uplift. Applied to the GVA without agglomeration, this produces the incremental GVA attributed to agglomeration effects in the 3UA scenario.

Benchmarking ensures that productivity effects are not applied in absolute terms, but only in relation to a realistic baseline. Without this step, the analysis could overstate or understate spillovers by treating density as meaningful in isolation

Step 7: Translating relative density into productivity uplifts

- 9.24
- The relative density ratios calculated in Step 6 show how concentrated employment is compared with the reference case. This step now translates these small shifts in effective density into measurable changes in productivity, and ultimately into additional GVA.
- 9.25
- The link between density and productivity is captured by an elasticity parameter. This measures the percentage change in productivity associated with a 1% change in effective density. Based on the empirical literature, an elasticity of 0.08 was adopted.¹²⁷ This reflects evidence for knowledge-intensive and service-oriented economies, which characterise much of Oxfordshire’s employment base.

From relative density to agglomeration multiplier

- 9.26
- This process is as follows:
 - **Relative density ratio:** For each option and year, the option’s relative density is divided by the baseline RD_ref (Step 6).
 - **Apply elasticity:** This ratio is then raised to the power of the elasticity (0.08).

This step is critical because it operationalises the theoretical link between density and productivity. The elasticity ensures that even relatively small shifts in effective density are converted into realistic but meaningful uplifts in output

Step 8: Incremental agglomeration effects

- 9.27
- The agglomeration multipliers derived in Step 7 are applied year by year to GVA without agglomeration to generate total GVA with agglomeration.
- 9.28
- To avoid overstating the benefits in the early years, the analysis treats these effects on an incremental basis. This means the agglomeration benefit in any given year is measured as the uplift compared with the reference baseline year (2023), rather than as a cumulative effect from the start.
 - In the first year (2023), the incremental agglomeration effect is set at zero, because the system has not yet diverged from the baseline.
 - From 2024 onwards, the incremental effect rises gradually as jobs grow and as more employment is concentrated closer to Oxford.
 - By 2050, the incremental effect reflects the full additional productivity benefit generated by the new boundary configuration.
- 9.29
- In addition to total uplift, the analysis also expresses the incremental agglomeration effect on a per-worker basis. This metric divides the total agglomeration benefit by the number of jobs in that year, giving an indication of the average productivity gain per worker attributable to agglomeration. It is a useful way of

¹²⁷ Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

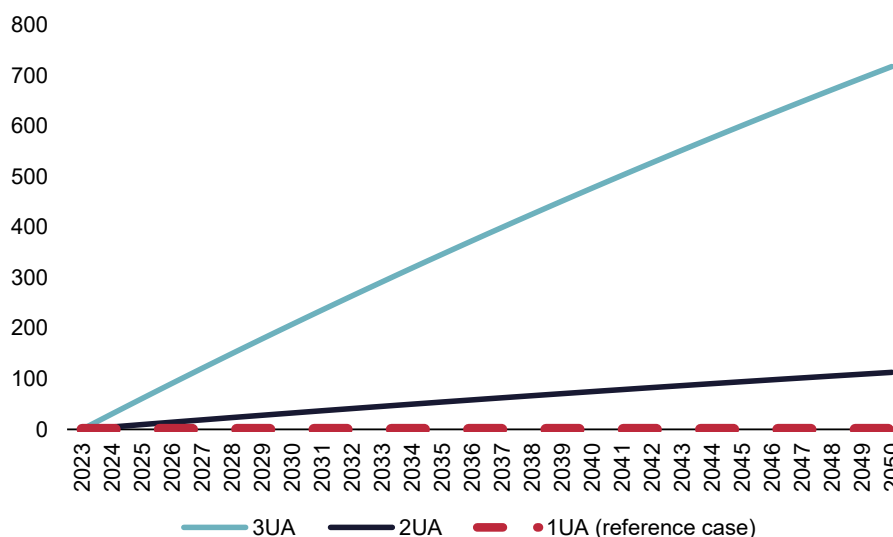


Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation



interpreting the scale of the spillover effect relative to the size of the labour force. This shows not just how much extra GVA is produced overall, but how much of that uplift is embedded in the productivity of each job.

Figure 7 – Estimated productivity increase per job in each scenario



- Sense check:** Literature suggests that there will be an uplift in productivity of 8% for every doubling in city size.¹²⁸ In the 3UA option, productivity by 2050 increases by approximately £700 per worker, relative to 2023 GVA per worker. This is an increase of 0.9%. The population across the entire area increases by 43% by 2050, less than half way to a doubling of city size. In the 3UA option, if all productivity benefits are applied to Greater Oxford (which will not happen in reality), the productivity uplift would be 2.1%. The population of Greater Oxford is expected to grow by 49% which is still less than half way to a doubling of city size. It must also be recognised that the 3UA option represents a county-level area, whereas the benchmark evidence from the literature relates to city populations. Because population growth in both the wider area and Greater Oxford falls short of a doubling, and the estimated productivity gains are already below the 8% benchmark, this sense check gives confidence that our results are in the right range suggested by the literature while still remaining conservative.

Step 9: Discounting to Net Present Value

- 9.30 While the model generates annual agglomeration effects in constant prices, these values cannot be added directly to give a single measure of long-term benefit. Future gains are worth less than immediate ones, so the analysis applies a discounting process to bring all future benefits back to present-day terms.
- 9.31 A standard discount rate of 3.5% per annum was used, consistent with HM Treasury's Green Book guidance for economic appraisal.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Centre for Cities, 2023. The impact of agglomeration on the economy

¹²⁹ HM Treasury, 2022. Green Book supplementary guidance: discounting



Contact Us

volterra.co.uk

npallai@volterra.co.uk

07956 572 854

Chester House
1-3 Brixton Road
London
SW9 6DE

Disclaimer

COPYRIGHT: The concepts and information contained in this document are the property of Volterra Partners LLP. Use or copying of this document in whole or in part without the written permission of Volterra Partners LLP constitutes an infringement of copyright.

This work contains statistical data from ONS which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

LIMITATION: This report has been prepared on behalf of and for the exclusive use of Volterra Partners LLP's Client, and is subject to and issued in connection with the provisions of the agreement between Volterra Partners LLP and its Client.

Volterra Partners LLP accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for or in respect of any use of or reliance upon this report by any third party.





Appendix D: Engagement Detail

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire needs governance that meets today's challenges and tomorrow's ambitions. The three unitary authorities (3UA) proposal delivers modern, efficient, and community-focused governance.

A comprehensive and inclusive engagement programme was delivered across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to support the proposal for LGR. A diverse range of methods and strategies were carefully designed to ensure meaningful, constructive, inclusive, and representative participation throughout the process.

Thousands of residents, businesses, partners, and stakeholders across Oxfordshire, West Berkshire and regionally shaped this proposal through extensive engagement.

The City Council delivered wide-ranging and inclusive engagement to understand what people across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire want from this once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how local government is structured, to ensure that our proposal is responding to their priorities.

Early and inclusive engagement has built trust and improved the quality of the proposal, reflecting a strong appetite for localised governance that meets community needs.

The Council has engaged with, amongst others:

- Residents across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire
- Dozens of Oxfordshire businesses including large strategically important employers
- Police & Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire Police Commander
- Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Universities
- 7 Oxfordshire MPs and four Berkshire MPs
- Healthwatch Oxfordshire
- ICB and health trusts
- Oxfordshire voluntary and community sector stakeholders and partners
- Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
- Oxford Civic Society
- Oxford City Council employees and their representatives, Unison and Unite
- Our partnerships Fast Growth Cities (Oxford, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Swindon, Norwich Peterborough) and Cathedral Cities (Oxford, Cambridge, Norwich, Exeter, Lincoln)
- Multi-Academy Trust education partners
- Parish councils
- Conference of Colleges (Oxford) in particular landowning colleges
- Oxford Growth Commission
- Oxford Bus Company
- Leaders of six other local authorities within the proposed geography, and Leaders of three neighbouring councils in Berkshire and Swindon

In addition, the Council has engaged and listened through a range of media including:

- Meetings and calls
- Workshops
- Stakeholder correspondence
- Online surveys
- Social media
- Round table events
- Community based venues across Oxfordshire
- Short-form videos
- Bus shelter posters
- Public events

3UA engagement programme

The engagement programme launched in June 2025 with a website, special edition newsletters, press release, short-form video, bus shelter posters and, Facebook and Instagram advertising. The goal was to raise awareness for 3UA proposal Oxford and drive traffic to the website.

In July 2025, the online survey and drop-in events were launched. The Council issued a press release, Facebook events, Facebook and Instagram advertising and TikTok advertising. The Council also created a series of short-form videos, with Cabinet Members inviting residents to visit drop-in events in Berinsfield, Botley, Kennington and Kidlington.

A series of short-form videos explored themes of the 3UA proposal: transport, housing, local identity and the economy.

Drop-in Events and Community Forums

A series of drop-in events were held across Oxfordshire in Oxford, Abingdon, Banbury, Berinsfield, Botley, Didcot, Kennington, Kidlington, Wheatley and Witney, and one in Newbury (West Berkshire).

These events provided opportunities for residents to ask questions, share concerns, and engage directly with council officers and elected members. Engagement took place with approximately 340 citizens across all eleven events.

Public responses to the proposals reflected a wide range of perspectives, highlighting both areas of support and concern across key themes.

Many respondents expressed uncertainty regarding future Council Tax levels, councillor representation, and election timelines. There were notable concerns about the potential loss of local identity, particularly in rural communities. A recurring theme was the need for greater clarity on the role of parish councils and how local voices would be incorporated under the new governance structure.

Feedback on transport and infrastructure was strong, with widespread concern about currently inadequate public transport links. Respondents called for improvements to Park & Ride services and raised issues around congestion, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), and road closures in

and around Oxford. Many expressed a view that transport decisions about the city were being made by councillors representing distant parts of the county. Some felt that current infrastructure capacity may be insufficient to support the scale of proposed growth.

Views on housing expansion were mixed. While some welcomed growth and the potential for increased availability of affordable housing, others expressed concerns over the potential for overdevelopment, particularly in areas lacking adequate services. Concerns were raised about building on flood plains and contaminated land, and there was a clear desire to preserve rural character.

Some respondents questioned the alignment of the proposals with climate goals and expressed concern that a focus on science and innovation could come at the expense of community identity. There were calls for deeper grassroots engagement and reforms to welfare systems to ensure social equity.

Concerns were voiced about Council Tax revenues being disproportionately allocated to urban centres, and questions were raised regarding job security for existing local authority staff. However, there was also interest in opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a strong desire for equitable service provision across districts.

Three major surveys of residents were conducted:

- The Council held an initial online Residents Panel survey in February 2025 that focused on gauging public appetite for change and understanding priorities, using its standing representative panel of Oxford citizens; 266 responses received
- The Council held an open survey on its consultation portal about LGR between 1 July and 12 August 2025. The survey was promoted via social media, local media, and community networks across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. It explored public preferences for different governance models and gathered detailed feedback on the three-unitary proposal; over 1,580 responses were received
- A second survey of the Oxford Residents Panel was undertaken between 23 July and 15 September which added questions on LGR to the standard annual survey of residents' satisfaction with City Council services

D.1 Key findings from our surveys

February 2025 Oxford Residents Panel Survey

In February 2025, Oxford City Council conducted a survey on the interim proposals using its Residents' Panel. The panel is a representative sample of Oxford residents managed on the Council's behalf by independent polling company Beehive.

The survey, which had 266 responses, found:

- 82% think the current two-tier local government arrangements could be improved; 7% disagreed
- 67% think councils should not be too large, so they better meet the needs of residents; 11% disagreed
- 61% think a single council covering the greater Oxford area would best meet the needs of residents; 17% disagreed
- 37% think a single council covering the whole of Oxfordshire would best meet the needs of residents; 40% disagreed

A press release was issued on the survey results:

July – August 2025 Public Survey on LGR

Over 1,580 people participated in the Council's main public survey on LGR, with a strong representation from across Oxfordshire's diverse communities and West Berkshire residents.

Table 1: Survey responses by current District and percentage of total responses

	Total	Percentage
Cherwell	153	9.68%
Oxford City	611	38.67%
South Oxfordshire	236	14.94%
Vale of White Horse	294	18.61%
West Berkshire	115	7.28%
West Oxfordshire	120	7.59%
Other	51	3.23%

Key survey findings include:

- 69% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the people they serve, enabling them to respond and adapt more easily to local needs;" 17.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Urban and rural areas often require different approaches to housing, transport, education and skills, and other key council services;" 12.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 75.1% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Housing, transport, education and



skills need different approaches between urban and rural areas;" 16.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed

- 68.% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I want to see more housing built in the right places to meet local needs (including affordability, proximity to family/friends, and access to jobs);" 16.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed

The Council also asked residents whether councils should prioritise "good quality services and responding to local need" or "cost savings." The results showed a strong preference for "good quality services and responding to local need."

A total of 914 comments were collected in response to this open-ended question, representing 58% of the 1,581 overall survey responses.

A press release was issued on the survey results: *Residents prefer smaller, more responsive councils, survey finds.*

Annual Residents Panel Survey 2025

Two additional questions were included in the 2025 survey specifically to inform the Council's LGR submission.

- The majority of residents (62%) agree that councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the people they serve, enabling

them to respond and adapt more easily to local needs

- An even bigger majority (72%) agree that urban and rural areas often require different approaches to housing, transport, education and skills, and other key council services
- A substantial majority of 90% agree that the council should prioritise good quality services and responding to local need
- Whilst levels of agreement (43%) and disagreement (40%) were fairly equal on the council prioritising cost savings

October 2025: Oxford Housing and Growth – Business Stakeholder Survey

The City Council sought the views of local businesses and employers to help inform the shape of LGR that best supports future planning for housing and economic growth in and around Oxford city. Insights from this short survey contributes to ongoing work to understand how Oxford can meet its housing needs while supporting business growth and sustainable development.

35 responses were received to the City Council survey, across the Health, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Education, University, Property, Retail and Voluntary sectors.

1. Over 80% of respondents said being located in or near Oxford is very or extremely important to their business success

- 2. Around 68% strongly agree that Oxford should go beyond Government’s housing delivery targets
- 3. Almost 85% agree that affordable housing near Oxford is important for business growth
- 4. 46% favour building additional homes close to the city, including suitable locations within the Green Belt. (23% would prefer development beyond the Green Belt)
- 5. Over half (54%) believe future development should balance new homes with employment space

Summary findings from the Business Stakeholder survey:

Location Importance

How important is being located within or near Oxford to the success of your business? – Please explain why being located within or near Oxford is important (or not) to your business, and any benefits or challenges you experience.

30 responses received

Being located within or near Oxford is generally considered highly important for most stakeholders, with significant benefits in client proximity, community engagement, academic and professional networking, and operational efficiency.

Challenges such as congestion, cost of living, and planning complexity are acknowledged but often seen as manageable trade-offs for the strategic advantages of an Oxford location.

Housing Delivery Target

To what extent do you agree that Oxford should go beyond the Government’s target for delivering new homes in and around the city?

26 responses received

Stakeholders generally support additional housing in and around Oxford, with a strong emphasis on affordability, accessibility, and community integration. Many highlight the need to ensure housing supports the local workforce, including essential and lower-paid employees, while avoiding sprawl or unsustainable development.

Some stakeholders also stress that housing growth must be carefully managed to protect green spaces, historic areas, and the city’s character, and be accompanied by supporting infrastructure such as transport, schools, and community facilities.

Importance of Affordable Housing for Business Growth

To what extent do you agree that the supply of affordable housing near Oxford is important for business growth?

21 responses received

Stakeholders consistently highlight that affordable housing is essential for attracting and retaining a full spectrum of workers, supporting local businesses, and sustaining Oxford's broader economy. Without access to reasonably priced housing, recruitment and workforce stability are significantly constrained, which can impact productivity, service delivery, and the city's research and innovation ecosystem.

Affordable housing is also seen as important for community cohesion, sustainable commuting, and supporting public services, such as schools, while helping create a diverse and vibrant city centre that sustains businesses and the wider economy.

Priorities for Housing Locations

Alongside sites within the city, where should we prioritise building the additional homes Oxford needs?

19 responses received

Overall, stakeholders support a balanced approach: densifying the city, making use of brownfield and greyfield sites, carefully extending into areas with good transport links, and avoiding or minimally impacting Green Belt land and existing green spaces.

Priorities for Future Development

How should future development be prioritised?

17 responses received

Stakeholders emphasise the need for a balanced, mixed-use approach that supports both housing and economic growth. While there is strong support for new homes, particularly to address affordability and workforce recruitment, many also stress the importance of preserving and providing commercial, office, and research space to sustain Oxford's economy, including the arts, leisure, and high-tech sectors.



Commercial Development and Jobs Near Oxford

What do you feel about delivering more commercial development and jobs close to the city of Oxford, in suitable locations in the Green Belt?

19 responses received

Stakeholders support strategic commercial development near Oxford, particularly to support the knowledge economy and sustainable commuting, but stress that Green Belt land should generally be protected, brownfield sites prioritised, and housing provision integrated to support the workforce.

Council Size and Local Responsiveness

A majority of respondents (62%) agreed that councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the communities they serve. This reflects a clear preference for governance models that enable responsiveness and adaptability to local needs. Only 22% disagreed, indicating broad support for more localised decision-making. Some respondents expressed reservations, potentially reflecting concerns about fragmentation, reduced economies of scale, or inconsistencies in service delivery across different areas.

Differentiated Approaches for Urban and Rural Areas

An even larger proportion (72%) agreed that urban and rural areas often require distinct approaches to housing, transport, education, skills, and other key services. This supports the strategic case for place-based policy design and delivery. A minority (12%) disagreed, suggesting some concerns about fairness or the risk of unequal service standards, particularly in areas that straddle urban-rural boundaries.

Service Quality vs. Cost Savings

When asked about service priorities, 90% of respondents expressed a strong preference for councils to prioritise good quality services and responsiveness to local need. In contrast, views on prioritising cost savings were more divided, with 43% in agreement and 40% in disagreement.

Stakeholder and Organisational Feedback

Engagement with key stakeholders provided valuable insights:

- University, Colleges and developers: Interested in the scale of growth proposed and opportunity to address Oxford’s housing crisis, highlighted the need to maintain strong links across the knowledge spine and noted the context of



Devolution placing responsibility for strategic transport and skills with an MSA

- Business and Community Groups: Generally supportive of streamlined services, delivery of affordable housing, local accountability, and economic development opportunities
- Healthwatch Oxfordshire: Emphasised the importance of safeguarding Public Health and social care integration, and ensuring local voice in health governance
- Parish and Town Councils: Expressed mixed views – some welcomed the opportunity for greater localism, while others sought clarity on powers and funding

Insights and Lessons Learned

The engagement process highlighted several key lessons:

- Early and inclusive engagement builds trust and improves proposals
- There is a strong appetite for localised governance that reflects community needs
- Clear communication about service delivery, cost savings, and democratic accountability is essential
- Stakeholders value transparency and co-design in shaping future governance

Digital engagement

Between June and August 2025, the 3UA engagement programme achieved strong digital visibility and engagement across six platforms over the period. A total of 32 unique content pieces were shared across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn and X, 11 Facebook events were created to support in-person activities.

The communications targeted the messages to Oxfordshire (763,218 residents) and West Berkshire (163,367 residents). This means everyone in our region saw our social media posts on average 2.8 times. A significant proportion of the views were on TikTok, where 74% of our audience is 18 to 34 years old.

Key outcomes included:

- 2.6M+ impressions – broad reach and visibility
- 38.8K link clicks – strong interest in content
- 1,650 hours of video watched – high engagement with video formats
- 8.3K reactions, 2.7K comments, 1.5K shares – active user interaction
- 1.1K saves – content perceived as valuable by users

The communications successfully combined reach with meaningful engagement, particularly through video content and link-driven actions. These results suggest a well-targeted strategy that encouraged

both awareness and interaction. Content output included:

- 32 unique content pieces shared across six platforms
- 11 Facebook events created for in-person activities
- Performance Highlights (4-month period):
- 2,613,111 impressions – total times content was displayed to users
- 8,358 likes/reactions – user engagement through likes and other reactions
- 2,771 comments – direct user responses and discussions
- 1,476 shares – content redistributed by users
- 1,100 saves – content bookmarked for later
- 38,874 link clicks – users clicking through to external content
- 1,650 hours watched – total video watch time across platforms (video content only)

TikTok and Instagram were especially effective in driving saves and shares, indicating strong audience resonance.

Key themes from verbatim feedback:

- Transport and Housing videos sparked the most discussion, with users expressing both support and concern
- Positive sentiment focused on solutions like the Cowley Branch Line to ease congestion
- Concerns included scepticism about housing developments respecting the Green Belt and fears of increased traffic

Emerging narratives included:

- Need genuinely affordable housing
- Avoid additional housing leading to more congestion
- LTNs are the core issue
- Suggestions for tram lines and critiques of bus commuting costs

Oxford City Council Member workshops

Four Member workshops were delivered as part of the Council's proposal development. Each workshop focused on key themes, were led and facilitated by one of the Council's senior officers and were open to all Members.

- Housing delivery and economy
- Transport
- Social Services, communities and housing integration
- Governance and local representation

The Council's core LGR team supported the workshops, and the discussions helped the Council to develop the overall proposals for a three-unitary arrangement across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

Oxfordshire Parish Council engagement

Two parish council engagement events have been held to consider each of the LGR proposals. The first organised by the Oxfordshire Association of

Local Councils, with about 50 parish councillors attending. The second organised by Beckley Parish Council in the form of a public meeting, with many parish councils represented. Key issues raised include rural identity and concerns about villages becoming urban extensions, the scale of development, and the need for improved bus and rail services. There was a need for better engagement, increased resources and a clearer voice for parishes with new unitary councils – with a hope that they might be coopted onto proposed new Neighbourhood Committees.

Voluntary and Community Sector engagement

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners were engaged through an LGR briefing session organised by the umbrella body Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action and through participation in focus groups organised by Oxford City Council. The engagement confirmed that smaller, place-based councils would help build local connections between residents, groups and local authorities. There was strong support for a more place-based approach highlighted strong support for community-led, locally responsive services, alongside several key concerns and opportunities for improvement.

VCS organisations included those from working in cultural, careers, social care, environmental,

mental health, housing older people, children and local community groups. A summary of feedback is set out below.

Community Strengths and Assets

- Strong support for hyper-local, community-centered, and thematic engagement, with smaller VCS partners seen as agile, responsive, and central to prevention and wellbeing
- Existing community activity and partnerships are valued, and building on these will improve prevention, resilience, and connections across Oxfordshire
- Neighbourhood hubs and community centres are key touchpoints, particularly where the co-location of staff has already shown positive outcomes

Collaborative Action and Governance

- Local partnerships and subgroups (e.g., nature partnerships, community associations) demonstrate the power of collaborative working. Sustaining and expanding these is a priority
- Clear appetite for participatory governance models such as neighbourhood budgeting and community-led decision-making
- Strong support for the three-unitary proposal as more responsive to local needs, with a focus on long-term outcomes rather than just cost savings

Support for Vulnerable Residents and Communities

- Rising demand for services for SEND children, young carers, and families is placing pressure on small charities, who face funding gaps and capacity strains
- Ongoing need for sustainable support and funding models for VCS, including reforms to commissioning and contract processes with a much more engaged and local approach, connecting residents to more local and bespoke support in their communities

Nature, Culture, and Identity

- Enthusiasm for green and blue spaces as drivers of health and wellbeing, antisocial behaviour reduction, and community cohesion, with alignment to Local Nature Recovery strategies
- Align environmental and cultural priorities across planning – embed nature recovery, green space protection, and cultural amenities in housing and transport growth
- Protecting Oxfordshire's cultural identity and ensuring cultural amenities and activities are distributed across new housing developments is vital to community cohesion and reducing travel pressures
- Align environmental and cultural priorities across planning – embed nature recovery, green space protection, and cultural amenities in housing and transport growth

Services and Accessibility

- Broad support for person-centered, locally accessible services, with blended digital and face-to-face delivery
- Concerns about gaps in basic local facilities like GP surgeries, swimming pools, and community centres
- Transport and connectivity, especially in rural and outlying areas, is a major concern. Better links to Oxford are needed for access to jobs, education, and healthcare. Integration with housing and support for sustainable transport is essential

Opportunities and Next Steps

- Strengthen and scale up local VCS partnerships, especially within prevention and wellbeing work.
- Explore participatory budgeting and neighbourhood governance to increase community autonomy
- Align transport, housing, and environmental planning to ensure growth directly benefits local communities
- Ensure clear protections for green spaces and transparent communication of plans
- Build capacity in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector through revised funding processes that address gaps and better link investment to local growth

Public Meeting on Local Government Reform – September 2025

Beckley and Stowood Parish Council hosted a public meeting in September 2025 to discuss proposals for Local Government Reform. Oxford City Council was invited to present, alongside representatives from other councils and local stakeholders.

The meeting provided an overview of the three proposed LGR models, outlining their respective implications and potential benefits for the community. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion.

Presentations were delivered by:

- The Leader of Oxford City Council (3UA proposal)
- The Leader of Oxfordshire County Council (Single Unitary Authority proposal)
- The Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council (Two Unitary Authorities proposal)
- Approximately 90 people attended, including residents, parish council representatives, and local activists

Stakeholders expressed significant interest in the implications of LGR, raising a range of questions and concerns. Key themes included financial clarity and sustainability, with queries about funding arrangements and long-term financial resilience.

Governance and representation were also prominent, particularly regarding the future role and capacity of councillors, the balance between efficiency and effective representation, and the preservation of local identity. The importance of maintaining local identity and ensuring accessibility to council services – including the ability to speak to someone in person in an office-based environment – was highlighted, particularly in the context of a potentially larger, or more remote unitary authority.

Environmental issues featured strongly, with calls for robust Green Belt protection and clarity on how environmental sustainability would be prioritised amid planning and housing pressures.

Partnership working was another area of focus, with questions about integration with key partners such as Thames Valley Police, the BOB Integrated Care Board, and South-Central Ambulance Service. The need for clear communication and engagement with parish councils was also highlighted.

Finally, concerns were raised about whether public views, such as opposition to congestion charges, are genuinely considered in decision-making, transport and connectivity, and ‘will parish councils really be involved and listened to’.

Stakeholder Engagement Register

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
GP Partner – Clinical Director – Oxford	Health	Meeting
Boundary Commission for England	Public administration and governance	Meeting
3 Unitary Authority – Survey	Public	Survey
Key Oxford City Stakeholders	Cross-sector strategic collaboration – Oxford	Letter
Oxford Civic Society	Civic registered charity	Meeting
Oxford Residents Panel	Public	Survey
Oxford Growth Commission	Economic development and infrastructure	Meeting
Oxford Strategic Partnership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Sector • Business Sector • Community Sector • Health Sector • Education Sector • Thames Valley Police • Voluntary Sector 	Cross-sector strategic collaboration – Oxford	Meeting
Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils	Public administration and governance	In-person. (All Oxfordshire proposals represented)
Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action workshop – 23 VCSE organisations were represented	Third Sector	In-person. (All Oxfordshire proposals represented)
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Public administration and governance	Meeting

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
Oxfordshire County Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Cherwell District Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
South Oxfordshire District Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Vale of White Horse District Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
West Oxfordshire Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
West Berkshire County Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Abingdon (Vale of White Horse District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Banbury (Cherwell District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Berinsfield (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Botley (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Didcot (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Kidlington (Cherwell District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Newbury (West Berkshire Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Oxford (Oxford City Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Wheatley (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Witney (West Oxfordshire District Council)	Public – In the community	Drop-In Event
Beckley and Stowood Parish Council – Public & Parishes	Public – In the community	Public meeting

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
Oxford City Council – Corporate Policy Officers Group (internal)	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council – Employees	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council & Oxford Direct Service – Employee Focus Groups	Public administration and governance	Focus Groups
Oxford City Council – Leadership Conversation	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council – Internal Officer groups	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Oxford City Council – Internal Framing Groups	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Oxford City Council – Leaders Group	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council – Group Leaders	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council – Elected Member sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Services, Communities, and Housing Integration • Transport • Governance and Local Representation • Housing and Economy 	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Lee Dillon MP (MP for Newbury)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Calum Miller MP (MP for Bicester and Woodstock)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Charlie Maynard MP (MP for Witney)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Freddie Van Mierlo MP (MP for Henley and Thame)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Loyal Moran MP (MP for Oxford West and Abingdon)	UK Parliament	Meeting

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
Olly Glover MP (MP for Didcot and Wantage)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP (MP for Oxford East)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Sean Woodcock MP (MP for Banbury)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Olivia Bailey MP (MP for Reading West and Mid-Berkshire)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Matt Rodda MP (MP for Reading Central)	UK Parliament	Discussion
Yuan Yang MP (MP for Earley and Woodley)	UK Parliament	Discussion
Thames Valley Police Crime Commissioner	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Thames Valley Police Chief Superintendent	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Unison and Unite	Public Service Unions	Meeting
Healthwatch Oxfordshire	Health	Written feedback
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board	Health	Meeting
Secondary Education	Education	Meetings
Voluntary and Community Stakeholders – three sessions, with representation from 13 organisations.	Third Sector	On-line Drop-In Events
Oxfordshire County Council – Service Transformation for Adult Social Care	Teach-In Session	Briefing
Oxfordshire County Council – Service Transformation for Children’s Services & SEND (Teach-In session)	Teach-In Session	Briefing

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Teach-In Session	Briefing
Conference of Colleges – University and landowning colleges	Higher Education	Meeting
Oxford Housing & Growth – Business Stakeholders	Oxford Business Stakeholders	Survey
Oxford Business Stakeholders	Oxford Business Stakeholders	Meetings
Oxford Brookes University (Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University)	Higher Education	Meeting
Oxford Bus Company	Public Transport	Meeting
Fast Cities Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge City Council • Milton Keynes Council • Norwich City Council • Oxford City Council • Peterborough City Council • Swindon Borough Council 	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford University Health – NHS Foundation Trust	Health	Meeting
Cathedral Cities Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge City Council • City of Lincoln Council • Exeter City Council • Gloucester City Council • Ipswich Borough Council • Norwich City Council • Oxford City Council 	Public administration and governance	Meetings
District Councils Network	Public administration and governance	Meetings



Stakeholder	Sector	Format
Mayoral Strategic Authority – Summits	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Reading Borough Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Swindon Borough Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting

Strategic Partnerships

Defined as: A long-term, mutually beneficial relationship to achieve shared strategic goals. Typically, deep, collaborative, and aligned with the core missions of partners.

- Fast Growth Cities
- Homes England – Statement of Common Ground (Duty to align to meet unmet housing need)
- One Public Estate
- Oxford Growth Commission
- Oxford Safer Communities
- Oxford Strategic Partnership
- Oxford West End
- Oxford Zero Carbon Partnership
- Oxfordshire Children's Trust Board
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board
- Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board
- Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee

- Oxfordshire Place Base Partnership
- Oxfordshire Resources & Waste Partnership
- Prevention and Health Inequalities Forum

Collaborative Partnerships

Defined as: A relationship between two or more stakeholders, that work together toward a shared goal or mutual benefit. Emphasising cooperation, shared resources, and joint decision-making.

- Adult Social Care (Oxfordshire County Council)
- Advice Centre Forum
- Age UK Oxford
- Aspire Oxford
- Barton Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- BICEP
- Broad Street Protocol
- Children and Young People Partnership (City)
- Children Services Oxfordshire

- Collaborative Housing
- Communities Joint Working – Oxfordshire
- Community Champions Partnerships
- Community First Oxfordshire
- Community Health Partnerships
- Community Impact Zone (CIZ)
- Cornmarket Street landlord forum
- Council of Sanctuary Local Authority Network
- Countywide Food Network
- Cultural Education Partnership
- Cultural Partnerships
- East Oxford Youth Partnership
- East West Main Line Partnership (Rail)
- Economic Growth Steering Board
- Homelessness Partnership
- Interfaith Forum/Partnership
- Leys Youth Partnership
- Littlemore Community Partnership
- Littlemore Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- Marmalade Partnership Group
- Move South East
- Northway Community Partnership
- Oxford Brookes University
- Oxford Strategic Rail Promoters Group
- Oxford University Hospitals
- Oxfordshire Local Skills Advisory Board (CIMPSA)

- Oxfordshire Migration Partnership
- Oxfordshire Skills Board
- Retail Bursar Group
- Rose Hill Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- Rose Hill Youth Partnership
- South East Strategic Partnership for Migration
- Talk of the Town
- The Leys Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- University and innovation partnerships
- Wood Farm Health and Wellbeing Partnership

Operational Partnerships

Defined as: A business relationship where partners collaborate to improve or manage day-to-day operations. Focused on efficiency, execution, and performance in specific areas of business.

- Asylum Partnership Meeting
- Carers Oxfordshire
- Digital Inclusion Network
- District Councils Network
- Donnington Medical Partnership
- Enabling Registered Providers
- English National Ballet
- Events Marketing Group
- Getting Oxfordshire online
- Hearing Impairment Team – Abingdon



- Landsec and Oxford City Council
- LiFT Implementation
- Local Government Association
- Local Government Information Unit
- Local Insight Working Group
- Over 50+ Group
- Oxford City Council of Sanctuary External Stakeholders group
- Oxford Social Prescribing Network
- Oxford Windrush Working Group
- Redevco
- Refugee Led Research Hub
- Tourism Group





Appendix E: Council Tax and Harmonisation

E.1 Council Tax

Council Tax is integral to council finances for ensuring the financial sustainability of any new unitary council. Inevitably, different councils have different levels of Council Tax charge which is the result of annual incremental political decisions at the different councils over many years. Through the creation of unitary councils, bringing together areas which have historically different levels of Council Tax charge, result in the need to harmonise those Council Tax charges over time.

Harmonisation must take place by day 1 of year 9 from vesting day, although if you move too quickly some residents receive a high Council Tax increase whereas if you go too slow residents on the same Council Tax bands get charged different levels of Council Tax for a longer period. Ultimately the levels of Council Tax and speed of harmonisation will be a political decision for the Shadow Authorities. For the purposes of equity between Council Taxpayers, it is preferable to have the shortest period of harmonisation possible. However, this must be taken in the context of affordability and the impact on Council Taxpayers of the annual increase. It therefore may be necessary to harmonise over a longer period than one year.

An additional nuance of the proposed Unitary models in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire is that there is a different balance of service delivery between the district council and the parish council in different areas. For instance, the average parish council Band D charge in Oxford City is £21 but in the rest of Oxfordshire the average parish council Band D charge is £114. Differences in the provision of services between different areas must be adjusted using a mechanism of special expenses which is an adjustment between areas made in the Council Tax setting process.

E.2 Special Expenses

Special expenses are applied when a main precepting body i.e. a district or unitary council, provides a service in a parish (or unparished area) which is provided in other parishes by a town or parish council. To avoid double taxation the cost of this service must be met by the Council Taxpayers of the town or parish where the service is being provided so a special expense is charged to the Council Taxpayers of that parish or area. It should be noted that special expenses are not additional spending over and above the budget set by the council but a classification within the overall budget.

Legislation (Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) specifies the items which are to be treated as special items for the purposes of calculating the Council Tax. These items include:

- A precept relating to part only of the council’s area e.g. parish precepts
- The whole of the expenses (or only some) of those incurred by the council in performing in a part of its area a function performed elsewhere in its area by a parish council
- Any net expenses which arise out of the council’s possession of property held in trust for a part of its area

It is item 2 in that list that needs to be considered in respect of the unitary proposals. The types of costs included in this item would normally include (not exclusively):

1. Cemetery provision
2. Community Centres
3. Allotment provision
4. Parks, Open Spaces and Recreation Grounds

E.3 Council Tax Harmonisation

Current Band D levels for each existing authority are:

Table 2: Current Band Ds

Billing Authority	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £
Oxford	2,252.70
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09
Cherwell	2,069.90
West Berkshire	1,921.41
Highest Band D	2,252.70
Lowest Band D	1,921.41

As already identified, harmonisation of Council Tax in the shortest period possible within affordability and financial impact considerations is desirable in order to achieve equity across the new unitary authorities with all service users in a new council paying the same rate. In doing this, councils will likely want to ensure that they maximise income in order to deal with financial pressures facing councils in both year 1 and every subsequent year. The new unitary authorities will also likely want to comply with the referendum limits.

The choice of methods and timeframe for harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authorities; these options are provided therefore for indicative purposes and the results have not been included in the overall costs and savings figures. The harmonisation analysis has been undertaken using 2025/26 Council Tax figures since these are a known factor; any projection to estimated 2027/28 Council Tax levels for analysis purposes would have the same overall results since consistent percentages would be applied to get to the estimated figures. 2025/26 Council Tax figures also have the benefit of being recognisable and published figures and are consistent with the use of 2025/26 budget information for baseline calculations.

There are four options for Council Tax Harmonisation that have been assessed:

1. Harmonising to the Highest Band D with a 4.99% increase
2. Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase
3. Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase
4. Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D

E.3.1 Harmonising to the Highest Band D with a 4.99% increase

Council Tax referendum limits apply to the overall weighted average Band D of an authority. Harmonising to the highest Band D in each unitary area after applying the annual referendum limit would inevitably breach the referendum limit. This can be shown in Table 3 which shows the overall calculated yields when a 4.99% increase is applied to the highest Band D:

Table 3: Harmonising to the Highest Band D with a 4.99% increase

£ Unitary	Tax Base	Weighted Average Band D	Weighted Average Band D Plus 4.99% Increase	Highest Band D	Highest Band D Plus 4.99% Increase	Council Tax Yield from Highest Band D	Referendum Limit
Greater Oxford	75,436.60	2,184.88	2,293.90	2,252.70	2,365.11	178,415,837	173,044,260
Northern Oxfordshire	99,142.90	2,055.58	2,158.16	2,069.90	2,173.19	215,456,227	213,966,023
Ridgeway	172,957.10	2,009.70	2,109.99	2,073.09	2,176.54	376,447,517	364,936,871

This option has issues for the following reasons:

A council cannot breach the referendum limit without undertaking a referendum, the results of which would be uncertain.

The councils will not be fully established when the Council Tax needs to be set and a referendum would likely be an unpopular move and a poor start to the relations between the new council and their stakeholders.

E.3.2 Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase

Council Tax referendum limits apply to the overall average Band D of an authority. Harmonising to the highest Band D in each unitary area but without a 4.99% increase would allow for harmonisation over a shorter period or with less adverse impact on those lower Council Tax areas. This can be shown in the following tables which shows the overall calculated yields when the highest Band D is applied to all areas:



Table 4: Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase – Greater Oxford

£ Current Council	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police)	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation	Increase on Band D	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation
Oxford*	2,252.70	47,637.8	107,313,672	2,252.70	0.00	0%	107,313,672
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	8,916.4	18,391,323	2,252.70	190.06	9.21%	20,085,974
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	9,429.3	19,547,788	2,252.70	179.61	8.66%	21,241,384
Cherwell	2,069.90	9,453.1	19,566,972	2,252.70	182.80	8.83 %	21,294,998
Total		75,436.6	164,819,755				169,936,029
Maximum Band D			2,252.70				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							173,044,261
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							3,108,232

* Excluding All Special Expenses

Table 5: Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase – Northern Oxfordshire

£ Current Council	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police)	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation	Increase on Band D	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation
Cherwell	2,069.90	50,400.6	104,324,202	2,069.90	0.00	0%	104,324,202
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78	48,742.3	99,472,372	2,069.90	29.12	1.43%	100,891,749
Total		99,142.9	203,796,574				205,215,951
Maximum Band D			2,069.90				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							213,966,023
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							8,750,072

Table 6: Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase – Ridgeway

£ Current Council	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police)	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation	Increase on Band D	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	54,723.5	112,874,880	2,073.09	10.45	0.51	113,446,741
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	49,722.2	103,078,596	2,073.09	0.00	0.00	103,078,596
West Berkshire	1,921.41	68,511.4	131,638,451	2,073.09	151.68	7.89	142,030,257
Total		172,957.1	347,591,927				358,555,593
Maximum Band D			2,073.09				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							364,936,764
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							6,381,171

Applying this option would result in a loss to all of the councils compared to applying rises based on a weighted average. This may be considered an acceptable cost to the new unitary authorities in order to ease the cost burden on individuals and / or to speed up harmonisation. Any Council Tax setting which does not take the maximum increase to the Band D charge will have ongoing year on year effects and the reduced Council Tax yield would roll forward from year to year and would be exacerbated by the loss of future percentage increases on the “lost” Band D charge.

E.4 Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase

Harmonising to the lowest Band D in each unitary area would result in a lower Council Tax yield than the maximum increase that each council could levy without breaching the referendum limit. This can be shown in the table below which shows the overall calculated loss when a 4.99% increase is applied to the lowest Band D and applied to the entire area:

If this option were to be chosen, the following would need to be considered:

Councils generally are under increasing financial pressure and increasing demand for services and Council Tax is a key income stream for councils to deal with the costs of demands on their services.

Any reduction in the Band D charge will have ongoing year on year effects and the reduced Council Tax yield would roll forward from year to year and would be exacerbated by the loss of future percentage increases on the "lost" Band D charge.

Table 7: Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase

£ Unitary	Tax Base	Weighted Average Band D	Weighted Average Band D Plus 4.99% Increase	Lowest Band D	Lowest Band D Plus 4.99% Increase	Loss of Council Tax by harmonising to lowest Band D (after 4.99% increase)
Greater Oxford	75,436.6	2,184.88	2,293.90	2,062.64	2,165.57	9,681,344
Northern Oxfordshire	99,142.9	2,055.58	2,158.16	2,040.78	2,142.61	1,540,902
Ridgeway	172,957.1	2,009.70	2,109.99	1,921.41	2,017.29	16,032,296

E.5 Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D

Council Tax referendum limits apply to the overall average Band D of an authority. Harmonising to the weighted average Band D would move all Council Taxpayers to the weighted average with some moving up and some moving down. One-year harmonisation calculations are as follows:

Table 8: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford

£	Band D (excluding police)	Increase / Decrease to Weighted Average	Increase / Decrease	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average	Total Increase	Revised Council Tax	Total Increase
Oxford *	2,252.70	-67.82	-3.01%	109.03	41.21	2,293.91	1.83%
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	122.24	5.93%	109.03	231.27	2,293.91	11.21%
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	111.79	5.39%	109.03	220.82	2,293.91	10.65%
Cherwell	2,069.90	114.98	5.55%	109.03	224.01	2,293.91	10.82%

Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,184.88

Gap from largest to smallest 190.06

* Excluding All Special Expenses

Table 9: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Northern Oxfordshire

£	Band D (excluding police)	Increase / Decrease to Weighted Average	Increase / Decrease	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average	Total Increase	Revised Council Tax	Total Increase
Cherwell	2,069.90	-14.32	-0.69%	102.57	88.25	2,158.15	4.26%
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78	14.80	0.73%	102.57	117.37	2,158.15	5.75%

Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base2,055.58

Gap from largest to smallest29.12

Table 10: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Ridgeway

£	Band D (excluding police)	Increase / Decrease to Weighted Average	Increase / Decrease	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average	Total Increase	Revised Council Tax	Total Increase
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	-52.94	-2.57%	100.28	47.34	2,109.98	2.30%
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	-63.39	-3.06%	100.28	36.89	2,109.98	1.78%
West Berkshire	1,921.41	88.29	4.60%	100.28	188.57	2,109.98	9.81%

Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,009.70

Gap from largest to smallest151.68

Although it is preferable from an equity perspective to harmonise over one year, as can be seen from the tables above, it may be favourable to smooth the impact through an extended harmonisation period. This would reduce the year-on-year effect to individual Council Taxpayers. Potential phased harmonisation for Greater Oxford Council could be as follows:

Table 11: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – **Greater Oxford** three year Harmonisation

£ Greater Oxford	Over / Under the average	Harmonisation effect over three years (per year)
Oxford City	68	-23
South Oxfordshire Parishes	-122	41
Vale of White Horse Parishes	-112	37
Cherwell Parishes	-115	38
Maximum Variance	-122	41
Minimum Variance	68	-23

(N.B. a positive variance means the Council Tax would come down; a negative variance means that it needs to go up)

The difference between the highest and lowest Band D in the new Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway unitary authorities is not as large as that for Greater Oxford therefore the harmonisation could be undertaken over a shorter period:

Table 12: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Phased Harmonisation

£	Years to Harmonise	Maximum Average Harmonisation upwards	Maximum Average Harmonisation downwards
Northern Oxfordshire	1	-15.00	14.00
Ridgeway	2	-44.00	32.00

Unitary status and need for additional special expenses calculations

Council Tax charging in Oxford City is different to that in the non-City areas being brought into the Greater Oxford area. This is because the non-Oxford City areas rely more heavily on services being provided by the parishes. Due to this there is a relatively large difference between the district Council Tax of the City area and the new areas brought into Greater Oxford.

Based on the 2025/26 Council Tax levels, the average Council Tax for the new Greater Oxford area would be £2,184.88 excluding the parish charge and existing Oxford City Special Expenses.

However given the amount of the difference between the district charge from the City and that of the parished areas brought into the new unitary, along with the differences in the parish related Band D, this is likely to be due to a disparity between the services provided by parishes in the Oxford City Area and those provided by parishes in the parished areas being brought into Greater Oxford. When there is a difference between areas for charging purposes there must be an adjustment called “special expenses” to remove double taxation. This would be in addition to the special expenses currently forming part of the Council Tax calculations for the current City Council. A rough estimate of the effect of this would amend the Greater Oxford harmonisation position to the following:

Table 13: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford Special Expenses

£ Current Council	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police)	Increase / (Decrease) to Weighted Average	Increase / (Decrease)	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average	Total Increase	Revised Council Tax	Total Increase
Oxford (exc. all special expenses)	2,180.65	-41.27	-1.89%	106.75	65.48	2,246.13	3.00%
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	76.74	3.72%	106.75	183.49	2,246.13	8.90%
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	66.29	3.20%	106.75	173.04	2,246.13	8.35%
Cherwell	2,069.90	69.48	3.36%	106.75	176.23	2,246.13	8.51%

Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base £2,139.38

Gap from largest to smallest £118.01

This would also have an effect on the phasing of harmonisation that could be applied. This can be shown as follows:

Table 14: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford Phased

£ Greater Oxford	Over / (Under) the average	Harmonisation effect over 3 years (per year)	Harmonisation effect over 2 years (per year)
Oxford City	41	-14	-21
South Oxfordshire Parishes	-77	26	39
Vale of White Horse Parishes	-66	22	33
Cherwell Parishes	-69	23	35
Maximum Variance	-77	26	39
Minimum Variance	41	-14	-21





Appendix F: Oxfordshire Waste & Environmental Services Transformation Programme (WESP)

OXFORDSHIRE WASTE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (WESP)

Oxfordshire Unitary Councils Models

1. Background

- 1.1 Waste, recycling, and environmental services are highly visible municipal services. In Oxfordshire local authorities deliver a weekly waste collection service to 318,960¹ domestic properties across more than 1,000 square miles.
- 1.2 They will form a significant part of local government reorganisation (LGR) in the county, providing an opportunity to harmonise both the strategic and two-tier operational delivery. It presents an opportunity to transform services and deliver very significant environmental, financial, and operational benefits to residents and businesses.
- 1.3 The current model consists of five 'high' performing Collection Authorities (District Councils) and a Disposal Authority (County Council). For the last decade Oxfordshire has been the highest recycling county in England with residents recycling 57.6% of their household waste against the national rate of 44.6%.
- 1.4 Although Oxfordshire's recycling rate is good, this performance has flatlined over the last few years and the cost of disposing of residual waste is the highest in the country². In addition, the county's waste infrastructure, consisting of 31 sites, most of which are end of life, requires considerable investment to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the future.
- 1.5 Local Authorities in Oxfordshire recognise the value of voluntary sector providers who play a critical role in delivering recycling and reuse services. There is an appetite to accelerate, invest, and formalise this relationship as well as work more effectively with the 318 town and parish councils.
- 1.6 LGR provides an opportunity for Oxfordshire to reimagine waste and environmental services and there is a real appetite to deliver fundamental change. Key data on waste, recycling and environmental services in Oxfordshire is outlined in Annex A.
- 1.7 In conclusion, Local Authorities in Oxfordshire have strong foundations, a case for change, and the appetite to transform waste and environmental services as part of LGR.

2. Transformation

¹ Oxfordshire Data Hub - Valuation Office Agency (2024)

² WRAP UK Gate Fees Report 2024-25

- 2.1 There is already an appetite in Oxfordshire to collaborate to deliver waste and environmental services. An options appraisal was completed in 2024 and detailed business case has been produced in 2025. This outlines a new operating model for waste collection, disposal, and environmental services. It identifies significant opportunities to collaborate in the future, including:
- The creation of a shared company hybrid model to provide an agile approach to transformation and delivery of the Governments waste and climate targets
 - Delivery of circa £99m in financial efficiencies over 10 years including £10.6m in procurement savings
 - A vision for infrastructure to meet the needs of residents and businesses
 - Supporting the climate emergency, biodiversity, and the circular economy agenda which are priorities in Oxfordshire
- 2.2 The Councils have set up a Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme (WESP) and are completing a shared company delivery options appraisal to determine the future delivery model which will be responsible for delivering the business case.
- 3. National Policy Changes**
- 3.1 The Environment Act (2021) and its action plan, The National Waste and Resources Strategy, has set in motion a series of significant policy changes that will reshape how local authorities manage waste and recycling.
- 3.2 Oxfordshire is already well placed to deliver Simply Recycling as each Collection Authority already provides a food waste and recycling service. The WESP business case has identified opportunities to increase recycling rates further and to reduce the level of residual waste. LGR provides local authorities with the opportunity to do this at scale and deliver greater financial and non-financial benefits.
- 3.3 There are further challenges relating to other policy implications that need considering. For example, the Emission Trading Scheme on energy from waste facilities and the governments net zero target. These ambitious targets can be better prioritised, planned, resourced, and delivered with the removal of two-tier complexities and the Oxfordshire WESP Business Case supports these government priorities.
- 4. Timeline and finances**
- 4.1 Local Authorities in Oxfordshire have been collaborating on waste and environmental services for the last year. This has resulted in the production of a business case for change. A roadmap outlining this journey and the next steps is outlined in Annex B.



- 4.2 The Oxfordshire WESP business case provides a comprehensive picture of the current as-is service and the associated costs. The scale of waste spending in Oxfordshire as a proportion of total local authority spending has remained stable at about 7% for a number of years – £98.1m annually.
- 4.3 The principal mechanisms for improving waste management and reducing its costs are:
- To reduce the amount of waste collected and increase recycling performance; and
 - To collect and dispose of waste more efficiently; and
 - Joined up procurement
- 4.4 The new waste and environmental services operating model along with the detailed proposals in the WESP business case would deliver significant economies of scale and the integration of services across the county; from the standardisation and optimisation of working methods; and from collective purchasing power.
- 4.5 The WESP business case outlines that £20.1m of investment over the next 10 years will deliver efficiencies of £99m with average annual savings of £9.9m net and a payback period of three years. The table below outlines the costs and financial benefits of the three unitary council options being proposed in Oxfordshire. A detailed breakdown with yearly splits of costs and benefits from 2025/26 to 2032/33 is included in Annex C below.

LGR: WASTE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SAVINGS ACROSS 8 YEAR PERIOD

(3 YEARS PRE & 5 YEARS POST VESTING)

£000s	Authority	Gross Benefit	Revenue Cost	Capital Cost	Net Benefit
Option 1	Oxford County Unitary	87,692	-	-	70,451
SINGLE COUNTY UNITARY		87,692	16,190	1,050	70,451
Option 2	North County Unitary	70,512	-	-	56,548
	Ridgeway Council	6,450	686	58	5,706
TWO COUNTY UNITARIES		76,962	13,716	992	62,254
Option 3	North County Unitary	55,795	-	-	44,428
	Ridgeway Council	4,853	601	50	4,202
	Greater Oxford	17,809	2,892	13	14,905
THREE COUNTY UNITARIES		78,458	13,931	992	63,535

- 4.6 Our proposals go further, by seeking to transform all aspects of waste and environmental services in the county: how the councils encourage behaviour change on the part of residents and businesses; how infrastructure is deployed to improve efficiency and service take-up; how biodiversity on public land can be fostered; and by improving the commercial performance of paid-for services.

5. Unitary Councils Model

- 5.1 Oxfordshire is proposing three unitary council options to the government. The WESP business case is LGR natural and supports each of these in the following ways.

Option 1 - Single Unitary Authority

- Integrated waste and environmental services across existing three Collection Authorities (West / City / Cherwell) and County geography
- A separate contracted collection operation across two Collection Authorities (South / Vale) until the contract break clause in 2030
- Thereafter opportunity to integrate across Oxfordshire
- The WESP business cases recommends a hybrid operating model including in-source LATCo model to provide the flexibility to transform services.

Option 2 – Two Unitary Option

- Ridgeway Council proposal (South / Vale / West Berks) planning to extend West Berks existing waste service arrangements across the new geography - with integrated operations once South / Vale local authorities contract break clause kicks in, in 2030.
- Providing waste disposal for S&V area from the outset - dependent on unwinding/termination of existing County disposal contracts
- Oxford & Shires proposal (Cherwell / Oxford / West) fully integrated waste operation - as envisaged in WESP business case - including existing County disposal arrangements
- The WESP business cases recommends hybrid operating model including in-source LATCo model to provide the flexibility to transform services.

Option 3 - Three Unitary Option

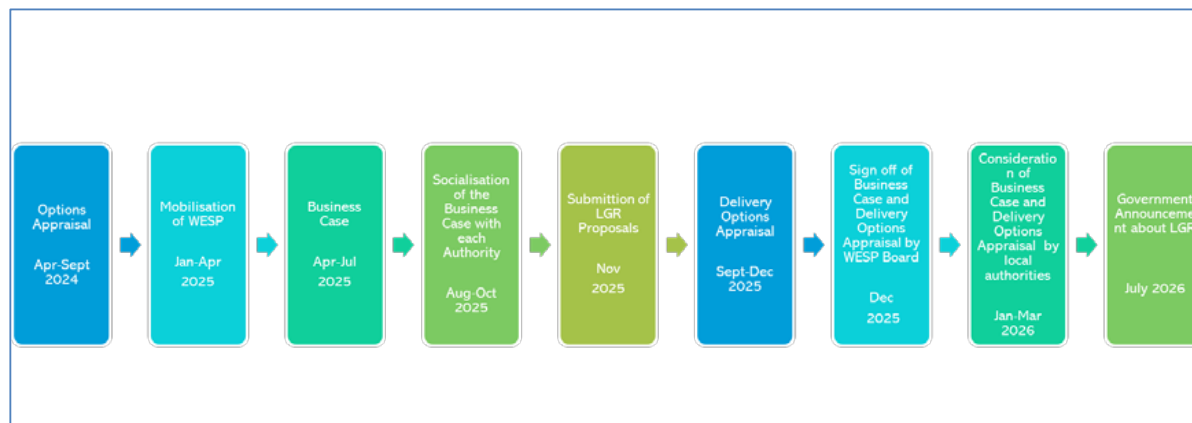
- Ridgeway as above
- Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire. Oxford & Shires proposal (Cherwell / Oxford / West) fully integrated waste operation - as envisaged in WESP business case - including existing County disposal arrangements
- The WESP business cases recommends a hybrid operating model including in-source LATCo model to provide the flexibility to transform services.



Annex A

- Gross spend on Waste and Environmental services in 2023/24 totalled £98.1m with a net spend of £78.2m
- In 2023/24 the 318,960 households in Oxfordshire generated circa 292,000 tonnes of waste and achieved a recycling rate of 57.6%
- The total waste and environmental services contract value held on contract registers for all Oxfordshire authorities is £886m, including long term strategic disposal contracts
- £20m generated annually from commercial products such as business and green waste
- A fleet of 600 vehicles with a capital cost of £72m
- 31 waste and environmental sites, most of which are end of life

Annex B



Annex C

Detailed financial projection of costs and benefits for each Oxfordshire unitary option

		PRE-LGR			POST-LGR					TOTAL £000s 8 YRS
		Year 1 £000s 2025/26	Year 2 £000s 2026/27	Year 3 £000s 2027/28	Year 4 £000s 2028/29	Year 5 £000s 2029/30	Year 6 £000s 2030/31	Year 7 £000s 2031/32	Year 8 £000s 2032/33	
OPTION 1 - COUNTY UNITARY	Gross Benefit	-	3,972	9,409	14,318	14,416	14,648	15,408	15,521	87,692
	Revenue Cost	1,120	4,030	2,890	2,490	1,390	1,390	1,490	1,390	16,190
	Capital Cost	0	550	0	250	0	0	0	250	1,050
	Net Benefit	1,120	608	6,519	11,578	13,026	13,258	13,918	13,880	70,451

		PRE-LGR			POST-LGR					TOTAL £000s 8 YRS
		Year 1 £000s 2025/26	Year 2 £000s 2026/27	Year 3 £000s 2027/28	Year 4 £000s 2028/29	Year 5 £000s 2029/30	Year 6 £000s 2030/31	Year 7 £000s 2031/32	Year 8 £000s 2032/33	
OPTION 2 - OXFORD	Gross Benefit	-	3,610	8,479	11,366	11,464	11,452	12,015	12,127	70,512
	Revenue Cost	987	3,679	2,599	1,931	936	936	1,026	936	13,031
	Capital Cost	-	550	-	192	0	0	0	192	934



OPTION 2 - RIDGEWAY	Net Benefit	987	619	5,880	9,243	10,528	10,516	10,989	10,999	56,548
		Year 1 £000s 2025/26	Year 2 £000s 2026/27	Year 3 £000s 2027/28	Year 4 £000s 2028/29	Year 5 £000s 2029/30	Year 6 £000s 2030/31	Year 7 £000s 2031/32	Year 8 £000s 2032/33	TOTAL £000s 8 YRS
	Gross Benefit	-	142	142	278	990	1,501	1,698	1,698	6,450
	Revenue Cost	38	42	62	83	113	113	123	113	686
	Capital Cost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58	58
	Net Benefit	38	100	80	196	877	1,389	1,576	1,527	5,706

OPTION 3 - NORTH		PRE-LGR			POST-LGR					
		Year 1 £000s 2025/26	Year 2 £000s 2026/27	Year 3 £000s 2027/28	Year 4 £000s 2028/29	Year 5 £000s 2029/30	Year 6 £000s 2030/31	Year 7 £000s 2031/32	Year 8 £000s 2032/33	TOTAL £000s 8 YRS
	Gross Benefit	-	3,329	7,566	8,645	8,743	8,764	9,317	9,430	55,795
	Revenue Cost	837	3,280	2,224	1,470	644	644	696	644	10,438
	Capital Cost	0	550	0	189	0	0	0	189	929
	Net Benefit	837	501	5,343	6,985	8,099	8,120	8,621	8,597	44,428

8

OPTION 3 - RIDGEWAY		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	8 YRS
	Gross Benefit	-	123	123	123	739	1,135	1,305	1,305	4,853
	Revenue Cost	33	36	54	73	99	99	108	99	601
	Capital Cost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	50
	Net Benefit	33	86	69	50	640	1,036	1,198	1,156	4,202

OPTION 3 - GREATER OXFORD		Year 1 £000s 2025/26	Year 2 £000s 2026/27	Year 3 £000s 2027/28	Year 4 £000s 2028/29	Year 5 £000s 2029/30	Year 6 £000s 2030/31	Year 7 £000s 2031/32	Year 8 £000s 2032/33	TOTAL £000s 8 YRS
	Gross Benefit	-	300	931	3,061	3,157	3,430	3,465	3,465	17,809
	Revenue Cost	156	405	384	514	349	349	387	349	2,892
	Capital Cost	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	10	13
	Net Benefit	156	105	548	2,545	2,808	3,081	3,078	3,106	14,905



Appendix G: Detailed Target Operating Model Blueprints

G.1 Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P)

G.1.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford is a city region that contains deep diversity, both of communities and of experience. Home to some of the best academic institutions in the world, several wards (such as Jericho, Marston and North Oxford) rank as some of the least deprived in the country – with overall population health in areas such as regular physical activity and obesity being good.

However, other areas of the city region (such as Northfield Brook and Rose Hill) are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country, with challenges around low household incomes, long-term unemployment and poor health outcomes being deep rooted. Many young people who grow up in Oxford do not see the immediate opportunities provided by the academic institutions and STEM fields as being relevant to them, risking further entrenching challenge within the home communities of the city. There is almost a 10-year life expectancy gap for men between those who live in the most and least affluent areas.

According to external assessments⁹, current statutory services at a county level do not have effective responses to people whose needs are complex but do not meet the statutory thresholds for support. With many support pathways being focused on the city, this drives a complexity of demand that the new unitary will need to effectively manage.

Additionally, cost of living challenges risks a wider range of people potentially requiring support. Oxford is one of the least affordable areas in the country to purchase a home, with house prices at 13x the average local salaries, and has some of the highest rents in the country – exacerbated by the local student population. This risks an expanded ‘squeezed middle’ facing housing and budgeting challenges – perhaps reflected in the fact that 28% of households presenting as homeless are in either full or part time employment.

However, there are strong foundations to build a preventative model upon to address these and broader challenges. There are a wide range of local activists, including informal groups, community spaces, shops, businesses, faith groups, and voluntary organisations in all communities. These groups, relationships and spaces are critical in addressing social issues such as loneliness and inequality and play a vital role in supporting everyday prevention.

⁹ Oxfordshire CQC Assessment, 2025

Alongside this there are complimentary offers from the existing local authorities and partners, including high-quality leisure offers available across the city region, offering residents tailored support around their physical wellbeing; significant grant funding to community groups, and community health and wellbeing workers in more deprived communities. Preventative work within homelessness has been nationally recognised for its positive outcomes, and community advice centres are already being funded within areas of the city that require additional support.

G.1.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire faces some of the opportunities and challenges that are typical of many rural areas, with dispersed communities across a large geographical footprint.

Market towns across the unitary face a range of pressures – from Banbury and Carterton having high levels of private rented sector tenures and comparative low levels of qualification across the population, to Chipping Norton’s ageing population and Witney’s comparatively mixed self-reporting of good health. More rural areas face challenges around connectivity to social and physical infrastructure, with one GP surgery having over 40,000 registered patients. There are specific pressures on services due to domestic abuse and migration, which require tailored support to

prevent residents from reaching crisis through effective outreach and partnership working.

There is a good local foundation upon which to build community-led solutions to these challenges. Existing community organisations provide both tailored support to specific communities and encourage community action in maintaining the local environment, strengthening community relationships and pride in place; community spaces are located across both urban and rural areas and funding arrangements support VCSE organisations to support their local communities.

G.1.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

The Ridgeway footprint is one of many local strengths – health outcomes are largely positive for residents with over half reporting that they experience very good health, and deprivation levels across the footprint are lower than in the other two unitary authorities.

However, this broad picture of strength should not shy away from some potential risks for households in this geography. Nearly 1/3 of areas in Ridgeway are deprived because of distance from services, health infrastructure and affordable housing. Whilst some of this could be mitigated by personal car use (with around 88% of households in the area owning one or more vehicle) this may speak to communities who are distanced from public sector infrastructure.

With an older and ageing population compared to the other two unitary authorities, residents being enabled to remain at home for as long as possible will prevent a need for them to potentially move to more urban areas to access support – a challenge reflected in CQC reports for both Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. Attention should also be given to the younger population, particularly around mental wellbeing, to ensure residents are supported from their teenage years through to adulthood.

G.1.4 Recommended Approach

We recognise that many residents across the three unitary authorities can effectively support themselves, utilising community and family networks to develop their own resilience. A core principle of this approach is investment in the community sector, based on our belief that prevention is best done in communities to enable a vibrant offer that empowers residents to solve their own challenges, without requiring the support of the council or statutory services. Where residents do require a council intervention, our community partners will be equals in service delivery and support, with co-location of services where appropriate.

Effective Early Help blends three key support elements: community-based support, digital advice and guidance, and statutory services. Informal and grassroots networks play a vital role in everyday wellbeing, digital tools help residents access timely

information, and statutory services provide formal help for complex needs. A coordinated, integrated approach will ensure that people get the right help at the right time from people they trust.

By fostering closer collaboration with health and voluntary sector partners, the councils will be more effective in coordinating care, alleviating demand on services, and enhancing overall wellbeing. Services will be designed to prioritise dignity, personal choice, and accessible community-based support, thereby strengthening local resilience.

Whilst there will be a universal services approach in each unitary area, each of the unitary authorities should specific focus to meet local needs within each unitary:

- In Greater Oxford this should focus on building resilience within the working age population, particularly on ensuring access to stable employment through reskilling where appropriate, maintaining tenancies and quality housing and supporting residents to manage their mental wellbeing
- In Northern Oxfordshire, a unitary-wide focus on reducing health inequalities and ensuring that all residents experience a good quality of life. This should particularly be supported by outreach around homelessness prevention and domestic abuse
- For Ridgeway, an emphasis on ageing well and supporting residents to stay independent into older

age through fostering community connection and sustainable financial management into older age

An insights and design function within each organisation will bring together data analytics capabilities with strategy, commissioning and operational staff to develop a deep understanding of the risk factors that may tip an individual into crisis. This will enable effective direction of operational colleagues and collaboration with residents and partners to design new approaches to meeting needs where gaps are identified.

Operational delivery will be enabled through bringing together teams into a single pathway across unitary and district services to effectively signpost residents who require a holistic conversation, whilst simultaneously have the capability and capacity to hold cases for individuals who may require extra support that does qualify as a statutory need. Staff will rapidly triage cases referring into statutory services early, where appropriate.

Two Public Health authorities – one hosted by Ridgeway and one across Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire to be hosted by one of these authorities. Each would have its own Director and Deputy Director of Public Health to focus on local needs, in line with the priorities outlined above for each of the three unitary authorities. It is proposed to share the function across Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire for efficiencies due to their current smaller population sizes. This would not

present an increase in staffing costs as there are currently two Directors and Deputy Directors of Public Health across the area – one each in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

G.1.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation

This model of EI&P will leverage existing community capacity and ensure VCSE partners have the resources and autonomy to meet residents needs as the area population grows. The council’s role in supporting communities and connections with spaces where needed, co-location, and relational working will support innovation with our communities. Commissioning of services will be shaped by the views of local communities. This will create a rich tapestry, building social capital and connection to enhance community resilience.

By more effectively using the wealth of data that district and unitary organisations hold about their residents, the new unitary authorities will be able to better understand the root causes of demand and use this to identify households before they fall into crisis. This could involve using Council Tax arrears information to proactively target money management advice, or bereavement notifications to understand risks of isolation with older adults.

Breaking down service siloes will also be achieved by using the opportunity of unitarisation to bring together service functions that traditionally

are dispersed across the organisation to enable residents to have access to a holistic approach to meeting their needs. Staff will be given the information and tools they need to have whole person conversations, that can result in individuals being signposted or having team of professionals wrapped around them for a short period of time.

A focus on localised delivery will also enable the effective use of community assets. Neighbourhood working is a central tenant of the new Family Hub schemes, as well as the NHS Neighbourhood Health Plan – with both having a focus on new ‘hubs’ located in local areas. These, alongside existing community hubs, libraries, leisure centres and wider public sector partners, could provide a confusing and building-centred rather than person-centred approach to innovation. Establishing a new way of delivering resident-facing services also means thinking about what services we can bring together in a way that makes the most sense to those who use them and releasing those are not required to effectively meet acute needs elsewhere – such as in care or education.

Partnership, culture, and commissioning practices are key to building trust and delivering prevention. By integrating disparate functions and developing neighbourhood teams, this will enable a clearer focus on strengthening community relationships and a shared approach, moving away from the prevailing culture of siloed working. It will build a collaborative culture where staff, partners and

residents work collaboratively to improve resident outcomes.

Being able to focus support at a hyper-local level across the 3UA neighbourhoods will enable the effective meeting of diverse local needs. At the same time it will maintain a core focus on the requirement for continuous learning together, improvement and flexibility to meet the changing needs of residents in neighbourhoods, as areas grow in population and experience changes in demographics.

At its core, the prevention approach will enable working alongside communities, focusing on community and individual strengths and therefore reducing the level of crisis that residents experience, and by extension, the long-term support they would need from the council. This service will work alongside communities and partners taking a systems leadership role to support more resilient and better-connected communities across the city.

G.2 Adult Social Care

G.2.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford has a fundamentally different population of adults when compared to the rest of the Oxfordshire footprint. There is a smaller overall population of older adults, and a much higher proportion of working age adults – partially skewed by the presence of the university and the urban centre – meaning that Adult Social Care support from prevention through to long-term care must meet these needs. There is also a need to ensure that the older population has access to timely and independence-focused support. Data suggests that older adults living in Greater Oxford are amongst the loneliest and most isolated in the country; and there is a higher level of adults being admitted to hospital because of a fall¹⁰.

Whilst the existing County-delivered social care service has been assessed as ‘Good’ by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), its areas of improvement are those which have the greatest impact on the city region. This includes ensuring there is clear communication with both residents and providers when individuals are discharged from hospital; supporting residents with complex needs – particularly related to mental health – within the local area; being able to deeply understand and reflect diverse experiences in social work practice and actively engaging with the VCSE.

Greater Oxford has much higher levels of diversity (24.3% residents with an ethnicity other than White compared to 13.2% overall in Oxfordshire), and higher levels of mental health challenge than elsewhere in the county (with a slightly higher prevalence of suicide and admission to hospital due to mental health-related concerns). This requires a focused and community-led approach to service delivery, which is central to the rationale for the creation of Greater Oxford with its own approach to social care delivery.

There is already effective collaboration in place between district councils, social care and health, around both hospital discharge processes to avoid residents becoming long-term rough sleepers, and in the effective use of the nationally recognised Home Improvement Agency to enable people to remain independent at home for as long as possible.

G.2.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire will be a unitary that, according to the County’s modelling¹¹ will result in the highest level of demand by the end of the forecast period. Whilst this increase in demand is across both the older adult and working age population, Northern Oxfordshire currently has the highest prevalence of dementia diagnosis out of the three unitary authorities, with cases in Cherwell increasing over recent years. This

¹⁰ Oxfordshire JSNA
¹¹ Newton modelling for CCN/
Oxfordshire

speaks to a need for services to consider how they can enable people to stay safe and independent at home, whilst also considering long-term independence for their residents.

Consideration will also need to be given to balancing service delivery between urban and rural centres. Demand is concentrated around Banbury, Chipping Norton and Witney as market centres, but can also be found spread across the Caversfield, Ambrosden and Fringford areas¹².

Oxfordshire's CQC inspection found disparate availability of care provision in different areas, our understanding is that Northern Oxfordshire is an area that currently has a disproportionate number of care beds compared to need, and future market development should consider how this can be better utilised and the market developed both in terms of core and cluster service delivery, and to ensure it is able to sustainably meet need in the long term.

G.2.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway on vesting day will inherit the largest proportion of Adult Social Care demand, with the highest proportion of older adults. It should be noted that the area has a level of comparative affluence which may be hiding overall demand for services due to a higher number of self-funders. Whilst challenging to estimate, the ONS suggests that as many as 62% of residents in some areas of the new unitary will self-fund their care¹³. This

requires the service to consider how it can support residents to make financially sustainable decisions about their long-term care, in addition to working with providers to ensure the market remains affordable and equitable for those residents with a different level of income.

Around 22% of homes across Ridgeway are occupied by older adults and are considered underoccupied¹⁴. There is an opportunity for the area to develop a wider range of quality specialist housing options that can enable residents to access support as they age, whilst retaining independence and a feeling that they have a place called home. This would also enable the return of properties into the market for families.

As with Northern Oxfordshire, support services are typically concentrated around the urban centres and there is a need for the service to consider how to leverage rurality in developing hyper-local, community rooted responses to meeting need – that move beyond the traditional forms of service and care delivery.

G.2.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign Adult Social Care service, run by their own Director of Adult Social Care. This arrangement should seek to continue the effective joint working that exists across the footprint with the local ICB (Buckinghamshire,

¹² Oxfordshire JSNA

¹³ Care homes & estimating the self-funding population, England, ONS (22/23)

¹⁴ Overcrowding and under-occupancy by household characteristics, ONS

Oxfordshire and Berkshire West), but with individually focused services that can be developed and shaped to meet the specific needs of each area, driven by a deep understanding of local strengths, assets and opportunities.

Partnership working between the three unitary authorities will be retained to address cross boundary challenges, such as retaining the cross-footprint Adult Safeguarding Board, and responding to demand pressures, such as hospital discharges through the winter months and cross-boundary provision.

G.2.5 **Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation**

The entry point for many residents into Adult Social Care will not be directly into the service, but via the prevention pathway which will enable residents to be effectively connected to opportunities within the community without the need for a statutory assessment. This new single route to support will be enhanced by tools such as chatbots, which will enable digitally connected residents to self-serve on issues such as benefits and small technology. Social care staff will provide input into multi-agency meetings as appropriate but will only become responsible for an individual when it is deemed that they require a Care Act assessment. There will remain a route directly to the service for those residents who are in crisis, or for partners who have a safeguarding concern.



Fig G.1: Functions in the new Adult Social Care departments



Short-term, enabling support will be an option for all residents – including those who are working age, shifting a default away from a package of support to the tools that a person may need to live an independent life¹⁵. In Greater Oxford, this could include greater focus on expanding relationships with local colleges in developing the supported internship programme and collaborating with local businesses to enable residents into long-term employment. Meanwhile, in Ridgeway this may include supporting residents to use equipment and technology to enable their independence within their own homes.

Existing strong collaboration between partners on the Out of Hospital Care pathway in Greater Oxford, and Healthy Bicester in Northern Oxfordshire, can be used as exemplars for designing solutions to meet the needs of other residents experiencing complexity, particularly around mental health. The new unitary authorities will be well positioned to not only better understand the needs of their residents, but to use this information to work in collaboration with them to design support services.

Leveraging the experience that the districts have in developing housing solutions to meet resident needs will also enable accommodation which is fit for residents to live and age well within. There is an opportunity for the unitary authorities to be trailblazers in their approach to developing accommodation for adults with learning disabilities and mental health needs to age well within,

alongside its older population. Delivering future-proofed, affordable homes will not only enable greater independence and improved outcomes for residents but will enable a shift away from high-cost residential care placements currently used across the footprint.

G.3 Children's Services

G.3.1 Context and constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford's geography presents a distinct set of drivers leading to children and young people entering the care system compared to rural areas. The Unitary is more diverse, densely populated, has a unique set of social dynamics, and higher levels of deprivation. These factors combined create particular safeguarding issues and family and child-level vulnerabilities. Economic precarity (Greater Oxford has the highest number of households in temporary accommodation out of the three unitary authorities) in urban cities often translates into parents facing higher levels of mental health and substance misuse issues, leading to increased incidents of neglect and domestic abuse for children and young people. This phenomenon is seen across pockets of deprivation in Oxford City as Barton represents the highest combined number of children in need and child protection plans (56) across any MSOA area in the three proposed unitary authorities.

Whilst the existing County-delivered social care service has been assessed as 'Good' by Ofsted in

¹⁵ According to nationally available data, more working age adults in Oxfordshire receive long-term support after reablement compared to the majority of their peers



its latest inspection, several areas of improvement remain that are crucial to preventing care entries, keeping children and young people safe and alleviating budget pressures. These include the need to bolster foster carer recruitment to reduce rising placements expenditure, timeliness of actions for children who have escalated to pre-proceedings and better transitional safeguarding arrangements between Children’s and Adult Social Care services to prevent exploitation of care leavers. Educational attainment outcomes for children in care also require improvement.

A sovereign Children’s Service will enable all three unitary authorities to individually and collectively address identified improvement areas. This will include localised transitional safeguarding policies and enhanced integration between social care, and the EI&P pathway which will provide a coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable young people transition safely into adulthood. Collaboration with the VCSE sector will be central to service delivery.

G.3.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire has the second highest number of children in need and child protection cases, the latter being 37% higher than Greater Oxford but 19% lower than Ridgeway, however the overall population (265,000) is significantly lower than Ridgeway (430,000). These statistics are driven by a multitude of factors including the higher

levels of child poverty in Northern Oxfordshire (10.5% living in absolute poverty) which is nearly on par with Greater Oxford (11%), with deep pockets of deprivation including Banbury.

Service delivery will need to focus on enhancing and equipping locality teams based in high areas of need with the right expertise to tackle the challenges which arise in large rural geographical footprints, including child criminal exploitation. Proactive outreach and engagement with households will also be critical to identifying what can be a ‘hidden’ cohort within rural geographies and addressing household vulnerabilities early. The role of education as a safeguarding partner within Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) will be critical in early identification of potential risk or harm to children and young people, i.e. children identified due to persistent absence. MACPTs will also be critical in implementing mechanisms to deliver wrap around support to children and families from partners including mental health, substance abuse and domestic abuse services.

G.3.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway will inherit the highest demand for Children’s Services across all thresholds including Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) cases – the total case load of child protection cases inherited by Ridgeway on vesting day will be 49% higher than that of Greater Oxford. Ridgeway also have twice as many Early Help cases compared

Greater Oxford and 29% more than Northern Oxfordshire. These figures are indicative of the size and scale of Ridgeway but also the level of socio-economic inequality across the area with a third of areas in Ridgeway being deprived, this contributes to household instability and negatively impacts parental resilience.

This will require earlier intervention, and holistic support offers for families and multi-agency child protection teams to carefully manage and reduce risks, underpinned by clear operational thresholds.

Ridgeway also has approximately 17% more children and young (CYP) placed in residential settings, 62% more CYP in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements compared to Greater Oxford and 22% more than Northern Oxfordshire – accounting for approximately 42% of overall placement expenditure across the 3UA. This will require a revised strategy in relation to sufficiency planning at a three-unitary level, investment into in-house foster capacity and capability and an operational focus on providing the right types of support packages and interventions. These factors combined will help to reduce children's needs and enable transition into lower cost placements with the overarching ambition of achieving permanence.

G.3.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign Children's Social Care Service, run by their own Director of Children's Social Care and senior management team to heighten service accountability and oversight. Each Unitary will recruit additional specialist staff as part of implementing the Families First Partnership Programme. The authorities will continue to maintain core county-level strategic partnerships and work together on critical areas to maintain quality, efficiency and market stability. Greater Oxford will also consider joint commissioning in areas where there are workforce shortages to ensure consistent service delivery across all three unitary authorities.

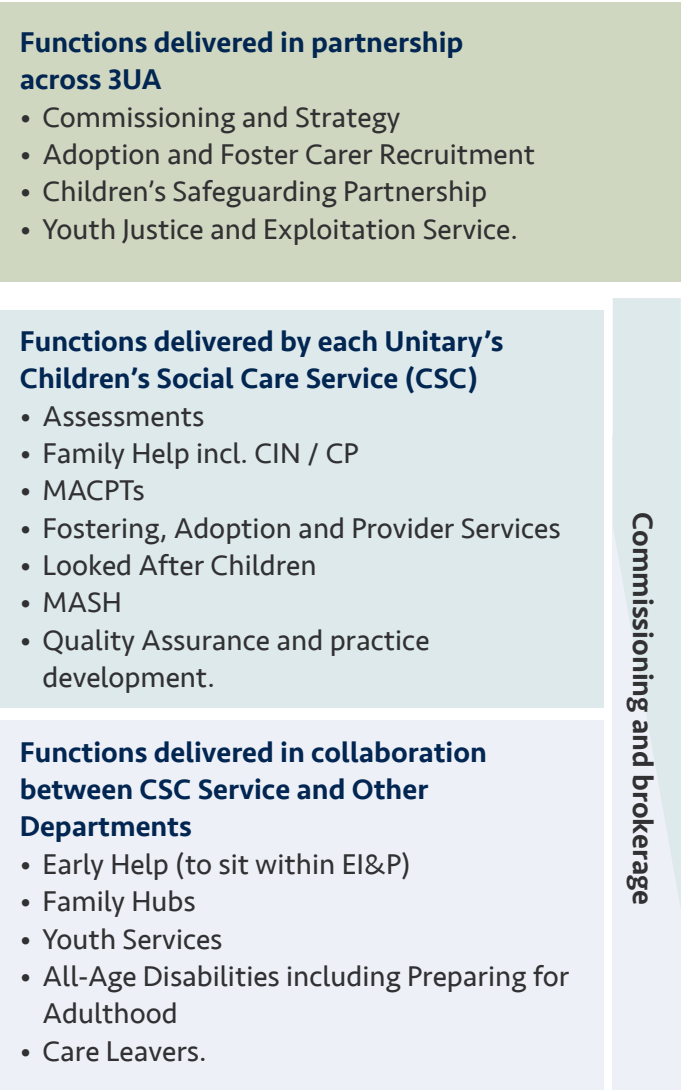


Fig G.2: Functions of the future CSC model

G.3.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking innovation

The referral source into the Children's Social Care service will vary based on the referring safeguarding partner or individual. However, the EI&P pathway will triage referrals (through multi-agency meetings where required) to ensure they reach the appropriate threshold and social care team; direct referral routes will remain open for cases where there are serious safeguarding concerns.

It is anticipated that the EI&P function will lead to more households being identified early to access universal and Early Help services to prevent escalation to statutory support services. This will be achieved through other functions including money and debt management and advice and employment and skills support, proactively identifying and addressing family circumstances that can contribute to its breakdown. This approach tackles the root causes in families to maximise opportunities to address core risks and prevent care entries. If needs cannot be met by the Early Help function, the appropriate assessment will be undertaken to ensure the child is provided with the support required for them to achieve and maintain a reasonable level of health and development.

The Early Help offer will adopt the Families First Partnership Programme ethos of making early support everybody's business – this will involve a county-wide, multi-agency commitment to provide



social, health and educational support as needs emerge. Work will be family-led, and practitioners will be trained in restorative practice to build trusted relationships with families. All three unitary authorities will adopt a joint practice framework to ensure consistency in service delivery across the footprint.

Greater Oxford will harness its expertise in developing housing solutions to meet the varied needs of cohorts who are currently or have been in care to improve their life outcomes. This will encompass exploration of accommodation options (based on a thorough local needs assessment) including respite care centres to support families to manage needs of children with disabilities.

G.4 SEND and Education

G.4.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

The 3UA proposal aims to address the differing needs of all areas and populations which will be analysed in more detail to determine the exact type of provision required to meet needs based on hyper-local insights at the implementation stage. The core drivers of cost for SEND services in Oxfordshire are aligned to those recognised nationally – a rapid rise in home to school transport and expensive privately sourced placements. In particular, and often out-of-county, independent non-maintained special school (INMSS) placements. The average

annual cost of an INMSS placement per pupil with an EHCP reached £119,340 by 2024/25 and home to school transport annual expenditure now exceeds the total cost of maintained special schools.

This has created a financially unsustainable position for Oxfordshire with a projected £100m high needs block deficit by March 2026. This requires more local provision closer to home for children and young people with SEND and earlier identification and mobilisation of the right types of support. The 3UA proposal provides Oxfordshire with an opportunity to rapidly achieve this ambition through enhanced integration between key functions including housing, planning, education and transport. Each unitary will also have control of funding from the dedicated schools grant to design and deliver provision and make operational changes based on local insights.

The improvement areas identified by Ofsted and CQC in 2023, and reassessed in Sept/Oct 2025, would be best addressed through the 3UA model, these include: insufficient special schools, quality and timeliness of EHC(P) assessments, waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessments, strategic oversight of alternative provision and early intervention and agencies within the local area partnership. Three sovereign services would enable robust operational and strategic oversight, more local integration and localised decision making – creating the ability for unitary authorities to be responsive to local needs. Each unitary will have budgetary responsibilities to

make improvements across areas of high expenditure to release monies that can be invested in resource bases and create more inclusive settings for children and young people.

Greater Oxford represents the lowest spend across all placement types accounting for 24% of all placement expenditure in 2024/25. The unitary also scores lowest on the number of children and young people severely and persistently absent across 2024/25. Improvement initiatives should focus on reducing the total number of INMSS placements (141) which are only 25% lower than Northern Oxfordshire, and boosting educational outcomes. Oxford has a significant proportion of its areas in the most deprived 30% in England, 20% of the most deprived areas are also amongst the 10% most deprived for education, skills and training. Some of these areas located within Greater Oxford require a focus on early identification of SEND needs and a robust Early Years offer.

G.4.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire represents 31% of all SEND placements across the three Unitarities and accounts for 30% of the overall SEND placement expenditure, (6% higher than Greater Oxford but 16% lower than Ridgeway). 39% of the unitary authority's overall placement expenditure is apportioned to INMSS placements. Northern Oxfordshire accounts for the second highest overall

percentage of children and young people who are severely absent (29%). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that 54% of all SEND placements across the footprint are accommodated within mainstream settings, marginally higher than Greater Oxford and Ridgeway.

This suggests inclusive settings and approaches are embedded in the system which can be further enhanced through new initiatives focused on mainstream inclusion and preventative work. Northern Oxfordshire has deep pockets of deprivation across many areas including Carterton and Banbury. Given the prevalence of children with SEND in low-income households, Northern Oxfordshire can explore expansion of SEND hubs or other appropriate provision in areas of highest need. Innovative strategies to tackle persistent absence can be adopted based on root causes including emotionally based school avoidance pathways and transport solutions.

G.4.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway has the highest annual expenditure on SEND placements across INMSS, MSS, Mainstream and other provision, accounting for 47% of total spend on INMSS placements. Ridgeway also has the highest number of annual exclusions (32) which is exponentially higher than Greater Oxford (8) and Northern Oxfordshire (9). The number of children and young people severely absent is also 38% higher than Northern Oxfordshire and 48% more than figures in Greater Oxford.

This indicates that the current education system needs to focus on establishing inclusive settings that meet the needs of children and young people; Ridgeway also has the lowest level of mainstream school capacity (290 placements) which is less than half of available capacity in Greater Oxford (690) and Northern Oxfordshire (642). Ridgeway's rural geography has meant it has contributed to rising transport related costs for children with SEND.

G.4.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign SEND and Education service run by their own Children's Social Care Director and Senior Management team to develop a local response whilst continuing collaboration across the county footprint on critical areas, including commissioning of specialist support and mobilisation of virtual hubs.

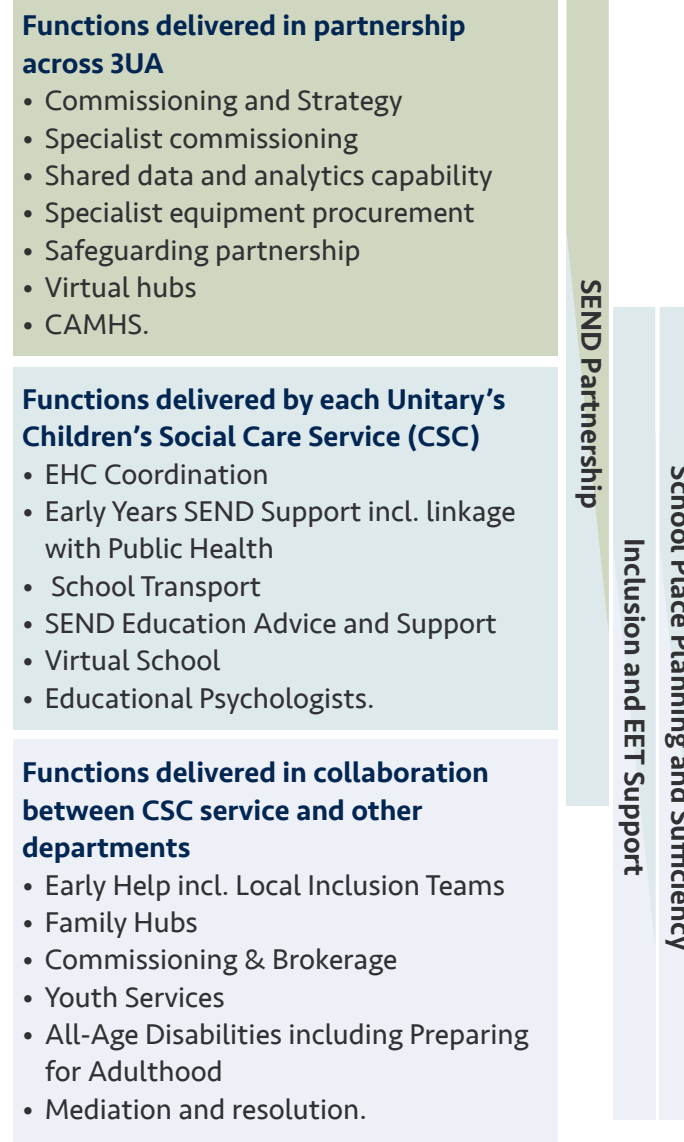


Fig G.3: Functions of the future SEND model

G.4.5 **Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation**

Similar to the Children’s Social Care model, children and young people will be referred through various sources including parents and multi-agency partners (i.e. GPs, Speech and Language Therapists and SENCOs). Families will benefit from the EI&P function which will help parents to access all universal and non-statutory level support as they initiate the assessment processes for EHC(P)s. This will help to maintain family resilience, for example through providing financial and employment support or signposting parents to local parent carer forums to be part of their peer networks. The local offer and processes will be made accessible to ensure parents can benefit from all types of support including SEND short breaks.

EHC coordinators will be critical to establishing trusted relationships with parents to advise and support them through the EHCP assessment process and ensure it is completed in a timely and high-quality manner. Plans will be reviewed regularly to meet the evolving needs of children and young people as they enter key transition periods. The Teams Around Schools (TAS) model will enable multi-disciplinary teams to integrate support services into the school environment to identify and intervene early through a family-centred approach. This will reduce exclusions, improve attendance and outcomes for children with SEND. Dedicated Inclusion Support Teams

comprised of specialist staff to aid schools in supporting children with more complex needs and behaviours will also be explored.

Transitions and achieving independence are critical periods and milestones for children and young people with SEND, requiring detailed planning and early collaboration with other services including Adult Social Care which will comprise of an All-Age Disability service to provide continuous person-centred and multi-agency support.

The service will also utilise emerging artificial intelligencesolutionstoboostworkforceproductivity, helping staff to complete administrative tasks including assessments at a faster pace to focus their resource on direct work with children and families.

G.5 **Enabling Services**

G.5.1 **Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford**

Greater Oxford is predominantly the city and urban extensions, with large outlying settlements at Wheatley and Berinsfield, and a number of rural villages in the Green Belt. The proposal also envisages significant commercial and housing development, which will require additional enabling services support.

The city population is younger and more diverse than the surrounding areas, and areas of deprivation

exist within Oxford and Berinsfield. This raises challenges for customer support, delivering for complex needs in these areas while ensuring the needs of the older rural population are also met. The combination of service touch-points, call centre and digital-self-service will be designed to meet these differing needs.

This authority will have significant assets, both in social housing and comparatively high holdings in commercial assets. These require support services, including legal, planning and maintenance services, but are a source of revenue and collateral.

Oxford City Council has a policy of in-sourcing services to its two wholly-owned LATCo companies, delivering housing and facilities management. These companies return a dividend to the council, and it is expected that these will transfer into the new authority, with potential to expand the scale of their operations.

As a newly formed unitary council, Greater Oxford will need to establish legal and professional services at a scale to support specialist recruitment, staff retention and delivery of statutory and regulatory services.

G.5.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire is a largely rural unitary area served by a number of market towns, including

growing urban settlements around Banbury, Bicester, Witney and Heyford Park, as well as a planned new urban settlement at Salt Cross.

As set out in the Demographic Distinctiveness section of the proposal, there are some stark demographic contrasts. Banbury has areas of significant deprivation, while the rural western area is more affluent but has an ageing population.

In terms of service delivery, this requires a focus on delivering for complex needs in urban areas, whilst being able to deliver a wide range of trusted services across a dispersed rural population. Physical delivery of services across a very rural geography is challenging, and requires a mix of targeted support for service access alongside digital self-serve and call-based options.

As a new unitary authority, Northern Oxfordshire will need to establish professional support services at a scale to support specialist recruitment, staff retention and delivery of statutory and regulatory services.

Under current arrangements West Oxfordshire is a shareholder in two LATCos, and it is expected that this shareholding will transition to the new authority.

ICT contracts, data assurance and service availability will be critical to delivering a wide range of services across a dispersed geography.

G.5.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

This area brings together existing unitary services from West Berkshire with district services from South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. It is anticipated that the majority of unitary structures and service support will be built out from the existing model for West Berkshire, with relevant staff from South, Vale and Oxfordshire County Council moving into roles in the new authority.

This is a large and rural area, with a small number of busy market towns. The Science Vale is a growth area for the knowledge economy and includes two enterprise zones which provide business rate revenue to the local council.

This authority will be formed of an existing unitary council and two district councils, together with elements of the current Oxfordshire County Council. West Berkshire’s unitary structure will provide the framework to expand and the range of statutory and regulatory services and support service transformation. Professional support services will need to expand in line with delivering across an expanded geography.

Physical delivery of services across a very rural geography is challenging, and requires a mix of targeted support for service access alongside digital self-serve and call-based options.



G.5.4 Recommended Approach

Service	Service Model	Model Detail
Finance	In-house delivery per unitary	Finance will consolidate district-led services (e.g. revenues and benefits) to unlock scale economies. The model aims to establish financially sustainable councils through strategic planning, improved accountancy, and leveraging buying power. Efficiencies will be reinvested to boost service quality.
Democratic Services	Mix of shared elements & in-house delivery	Each unitary will operate a Leader and Cabinet model supported by a centralised Democratic Services team and dedicated scrutiny arms. A new constitution, electoral systems, and committee structures will be established. For shared services and partnerships that run across the LGR area, rationalisation and joint working will ensure consistency of support.
HR and OD	In-house delivery per unitary	A centralised HR service will lead cultural integration, talent management, and organisational development. It will embed high-performance cultures, ensure legal compliance, and support flexible, values-based working. Economies of scale will be achieved without compromising responsiveness.
ICT and Digital	In-house delivery per unitary	ICT will underpin a unified digital workplace via a shared Microsoft 365 tenant. It will consolidate infrastructure, harmonise systems, and enhance cyber security. The phased rollout will align with contract expiries and support transformation through automation and data innovation.
Transformation & PMO	In-house delivery per unitary	Two PMOs (Development and Operational) will oversee the transition programme for at least two years. A core team will be supported by seconded specialists. The PMO will provide governance, drive change, and ensure coherent delivery across all workstreams.
Legal	In-house delivery per unitary	Each unitary will provide its own legal services to support effective and compliant delivery.

Service	Service Model	Model Detail
Audit	In-house delivery per unitary	Each unitary will maintain an internal audit plan, charter, and risk strategy. External auditors will be appointed to oversee account closure. Audit committees will provide governance.
Procurement	In-house delivery per unitary	A modern, integrated procurement unit will reduce contract duplication and streamline commissioning. Shared frameworks and a single contract register will improve efficiency and enable market development.
Strategy & Policy	In-house delivery per unitary	This function will coordinate strategic planning, statutory business plans, and policy development. It will support leadership teams, ensure compliance, and enable strategic coherence across unitary authorities. Automation will drive future cost savings.
Data & Insight	In-house delivery per unitary	The data & insight teams will expand to manage richer, integrated data across new geographies. It will support evidence-based decision-making, strategic partnerships, and performance monitoring. Investment in tools and skills will be essential.
Customer Services	In-house delivery per unitary	A single digital layer will enable joined-up contact centres and application processing. Community-based touchpoints and digital-first design will improve access and responsiveness, while delivering efficiency gains.
Communications	In-house delivery per unitary	Communications teams will be TUPE'd and streamlined, with 25% efficiency savings expected. Internal comms will embed new cultures. Digital-by-design approaches, including AI and video, will enhance accessibility and support further savings.

Appendix H: Implementation RAID Log

This high-level Risk, Assumptions, Issues, and Dependencies (RAID) log has been developed alongside the target operating model design and draws on previous transformation best practice and guidance from other areas who have undertaken Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It provides a consolidated view of key transition challenges and considerations, grouped under our four guiding principles for LGR:

- Community & people centred design
- System innovation & transformation
- Financial sustainability
- Governance & control

Each entry in the log is structured to support clear understanding and prioritisation:

- **Type** – Identifies whether the item is a Risk, Assumption, Issue, or Dependency.
- **Description** – Summarises the concern or dependency and outlines its potential implications.
- **Rating** – Indicates the level of priority (High, Medium, Low) based on urgency and strategic importance. This is not a measure of impact likelihood, but rather a guide for focus and resource allocation.
- **Mitigation** – Suggests actions or strategies that could reduce negative impacts or support successful delivery.

This RAID log is intended to support programme governance, enable proactive risk management, and ensure alignment with our strategic principles throughout the transition process.

Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Community & People Centred Design			
Risk	Loss of institutional knowledge due to staff turnover caused by change	Medium	Prioritise retention of key officers and knowledge transfer mechanisms
Risk	Some managers may lack capability or capacity to lead transition	Medium	Bring in additional transition capacity where needed and provide support to those leading transition
Risk	Formation of new workforce groups may erode strong organisational cultures	Medium	Build new organisational identity and values-based culture
Risk	Engaging multiple unions may result in inconsistent approaches	Medium	Develop a coordinated Union engagement strategy
Assumption	Unions and workforce reps will engage constructively	Medium	Maintain open communication and early involvement
System Innovation & Transformation			
Risk	Payroll errors during system migration	High	Implement robust testing and validation of payroll systems
Risk	Complexities in splitting shared staff and services	High	Develop clear workforce allocation protocols and legal frameworks
Risk	Human Resource (HR) teams may lack capacity for transformation	High	Increase HR resourcing and prioritise transformation support
Risk	Multiple employment terms complicate harmonisation	Medium	Establish a harmonisation working group and legal review
Risk	Unsupported systems may need replacing	Medium	Map systems and contract end dates; plan phased replacement
Risk	Data migration may result in inaccuracies or breaches	High	Conduct data cleansing and mapping exercises



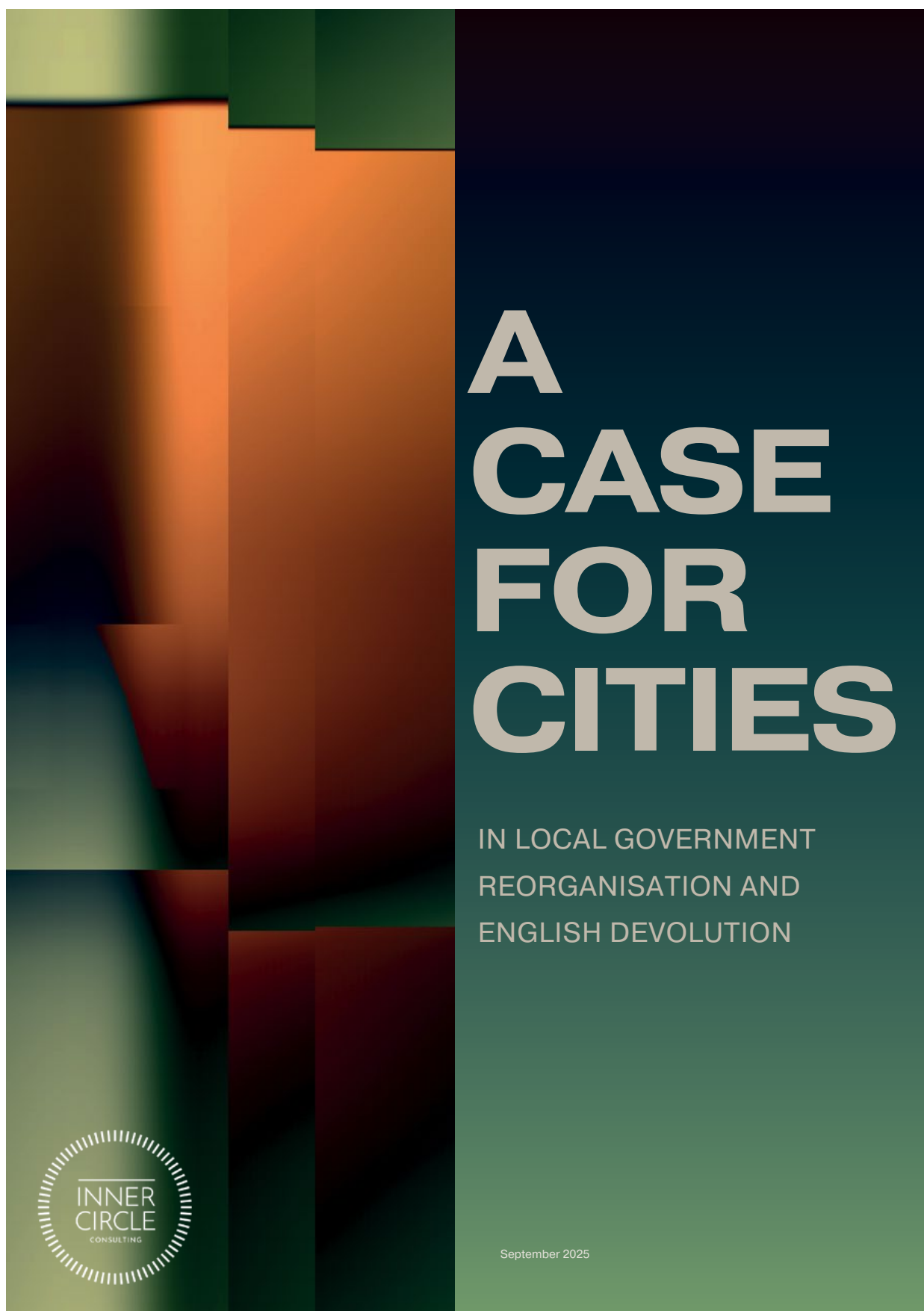
Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Risk	New social care systems may not be ready by vesting day	Medium	Prioritise safe and legal service continuity; monitor provider readiness
Risk	Barriers to multi-agency data sharing	Medium	Develop data-sharing agreements and protocols
Dependency	Payroll and workforce migration depends on timely access to data	High	Secure early access and validate data integrity
Dependency	EI&P success depends on culture, legislation, and financial support	High	Align leadership support and legislative compliance
Financial Sustainability			
Risk	Financial pressures may discourage investment in Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P)	Medium	Embed prevention in operating model and use digital tools for efficiency
Assumption	Public Health and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) leads will be engaged	Medium	Confirm availability and integrate into planning early
Dependency	Harmonisation of terms depends on HR coordination	Medium	Establish cross-council coordination group(s)
Governance & Control			
Risk	Employment law changes may lead to non-compliance	Medium	Monitor legislation and coordinate implementation across councils
Risk	Planning policy changes may cause market uncertainty	Low	Monitor developments and engage with planning teams
Risk	Electoral boundary changes require additional work	Medium	Plan consultation and resource allocation early
Dependency	Electoral boundary changes depend on Boundary Commission for England (BCfE) approval	Medium	Maintain dialogue with BCfE and prepare contingencies
Assumption	Government decisions will be announced in time	Medium	Maintain ongoing engagement with central Government
Assumption	HR and transition teams will have authority and capacity to lead change	Medium	Confirm governance structures and empower teams





Appendix I: **Case for Cities Report 2025**

produced by Inner Circle Consulting



Foreword

England's smaller cities are some of our the nation's greatest assets. English cities are economically dynamic centres of innovation, creativity, and culture - places with long history, deep roots and bold ambitions. From cathedral cities to the once historic market towns turned modern hubs, they generate ideas, nurture talent, and power regional economies. Their scale gives them something unique: the ability to connect people, place, and opportunity in ways that can transform lives and strengthen whole regions. They deserve attention, to be recognised and celebrated

Equally we can't deny that cities face their own distinct challenges - the reality is that many of our cities embody both the UK's greatest potential and its starkest inequalities. My city of Oxford is a prime example. In Oxford, world-class scientific and technological research labs sit only a few hundred metres from communities living in severe housing poverty. At the same time as Oxford's scientists produce the medicines of the future, men in the worst-off parts of my city live on average for twelve fewer years than in the best-off areas.

This is not unique to Oxford. Across the UK, smaller and medium-sized cities drive regional economies and provide opportunity for surrounding towns and rural communities, they carry the weight of complex challenges without the powers to address them at the scale required - we need governance which reflects our challenges and opportunities across cities. Cities like Oxford have different profiles to their surrounding counties that risk being 'swallowed up' into them. Instead, governance should reflect the fact that local people want and need control over their own economic development, housing, education, transport, social care and other services.

This is why getting the governance right matters. Our country is highly centralised. That centralisation will not diminish if our smaller cities have less control over their development, with this ceded to counties. Instead, we need to enable and empower cities to realise their potential, building on successful metro mayor models by making them fit for our smaller and medium-sized cities.

So much of the potential in cities remains untapped. Getting this right means our cities could be doing even more to drive national prosperity, strengthen communities, and tackle the great challenges of our age, from the housing crisis to health inequalities, from decarbonisation to skills – yet too many are held back by governance systems designed for a different era.

This timely report sets out the promise of cities and the reasons why they must be recognised meaningfully in Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution through city-led unitaries which are right-sized, with commitment to with a long-term cities strategy, and investment in their collective power, as a network of high-performing cities.

This fascinating report sets out the case for cities - what places like Oxford, Lincoln, Norwich and Exeter could deliver for our country and its economy if local people had more control. If we want stronger public services, higher productivity, and thriving local economies, then we must give our cities the powers to act with clarity, coherence, and confidence.

The Rt Hon. Anneliese Dodds,
Member of Parliament for Oxford East



Executive Summary	4
Making the Case	8
Governance Structure	9
Key Statistics	11
Strategic Place Index	13
Our Recommendations	25
Case Studies	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cities are being held back – now is the time to let them grow

Cities are our engines of growth and prosperity. But they are constrained and limited by outmoded boundaries and governance structures – with many city boundaries defined half a century ago and some as far back as the 19th century. English cities have remained underpowered, underbounded and underfunded as European and global competitors have grown and evolved at a faster pace.

Under this government there is a unique chance for change – a vital window of opportunity presented by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and regional devolution to create the conditions for our cities to flourish. But this window of opportunity is closing.

We must seize this moment. Now is time to invest in city-led unitary authorities, and back them with a long term strategy that unlocks their full potential for innovative, inclusive growth and prosperity, not just for cities but for the benefit of the whole country and every community.

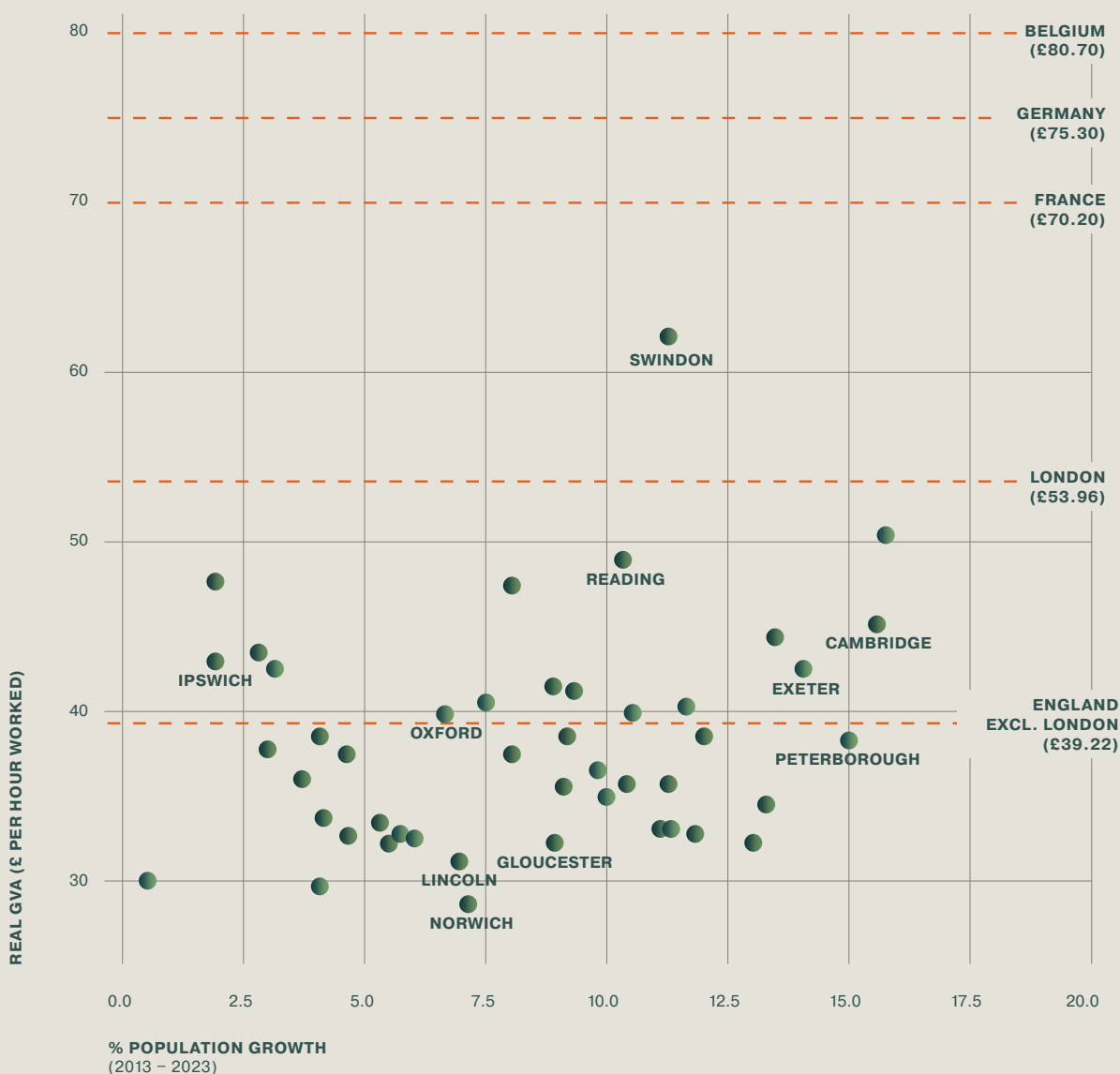
This report has been prepared on behalf of a coalition of fast-growing smaller cities of national significance



The untapped potential of English cities

The data shows that cities in England have untapped potential when we compare them to international averages and perform unevenly when compared to national benchmarks. Local government reorganisation and devolution represent a chance to address the barriers to urban growth and unlock potential for greater prosperity.

**REAL GVA PER HOUR WORKED (2023)
VS POPULATION GROWTH (2013 – 2023)**



- GVA per hour worked: ICC Strategic Place Index, 2025 informed by ONS, UK small area gross value added estimates, 2022
- Population: ONS, Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, 2024
- International comparators: OECD Productivity levels, Gross Domestic Product per Hour Worked, 2023 (using average 2023 US/ GBP conversion rate)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A summary of our recommendations

To create the conditions for a networks of enabled cities to contribute to our collective future, we need to:

Empower cities through single-tier governance

By creating a new generation of city-led unitaries, distinct from county-scale models, so cities can govern at the right scale to deliver growth, reform, and prevention for their communities.

Right-size city-led unitaries

By reforming outmoded boundaries so cities can plan and deliver across the real places where people live, work, and move.

Commit to a long term national cities strategy

By establishing a long term cross-government strategy that recognises cities' role in delivering national missions and key commitments such as the spending review and industrial strategy.

Back a polycentric England

By investing in a connected network of high-performing cities, beyond the core city-led metropolitan areas, to drive balanced growth across England and the UK.

Hardwire prevention into public services

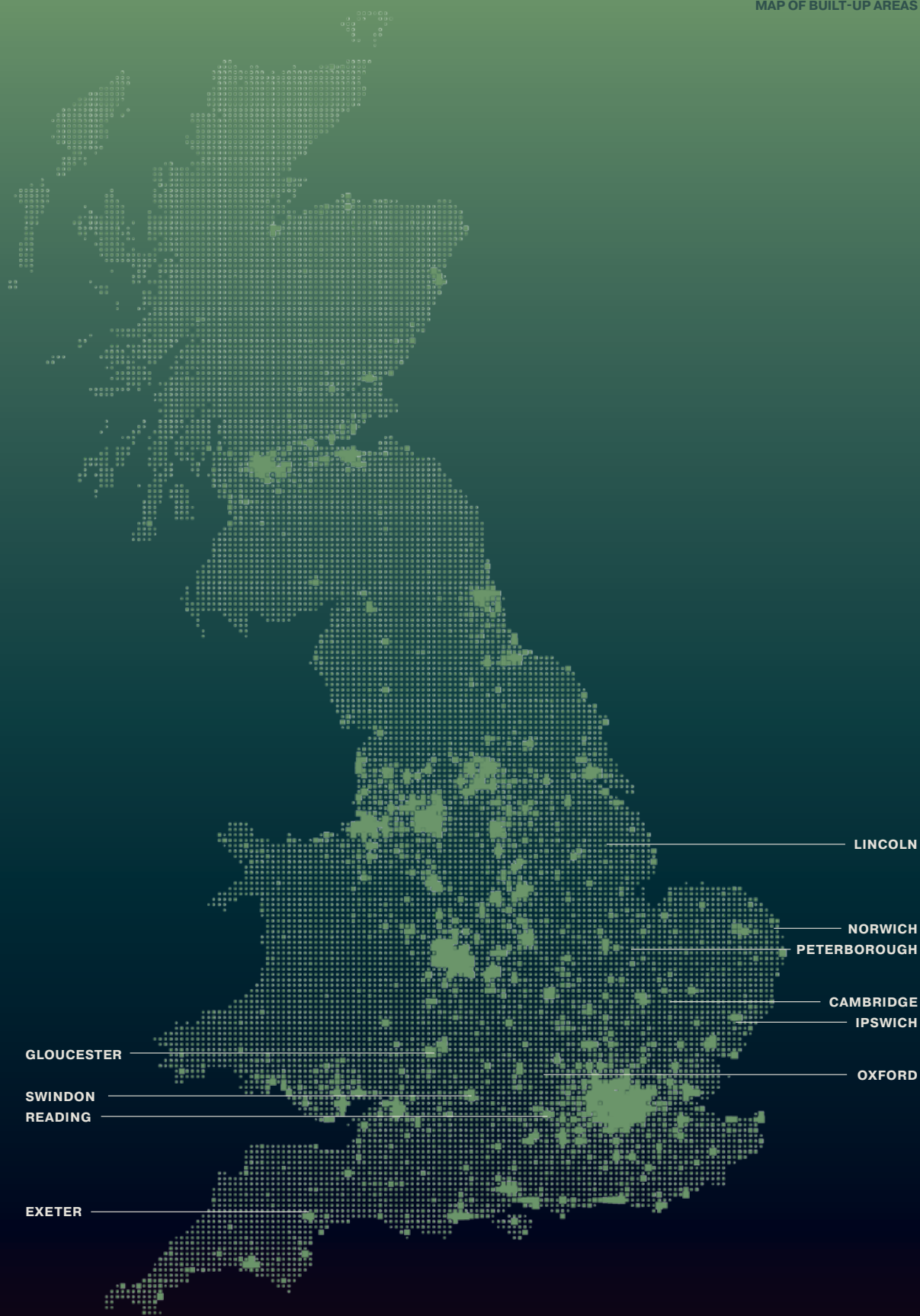
By equipping cities to lead on prevention by aligning health, housing, and care services at the urban scale, with the data, powers, and partnerships needed to act early.

Embed city-led unitaries in devolution deals

By ensuring all Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) have strong, empowered city-led unitaries, capable of driving delivery and shaping strategy from the ground up.



MAP OF BUILT-UP AREAS



MAKING THE CASE

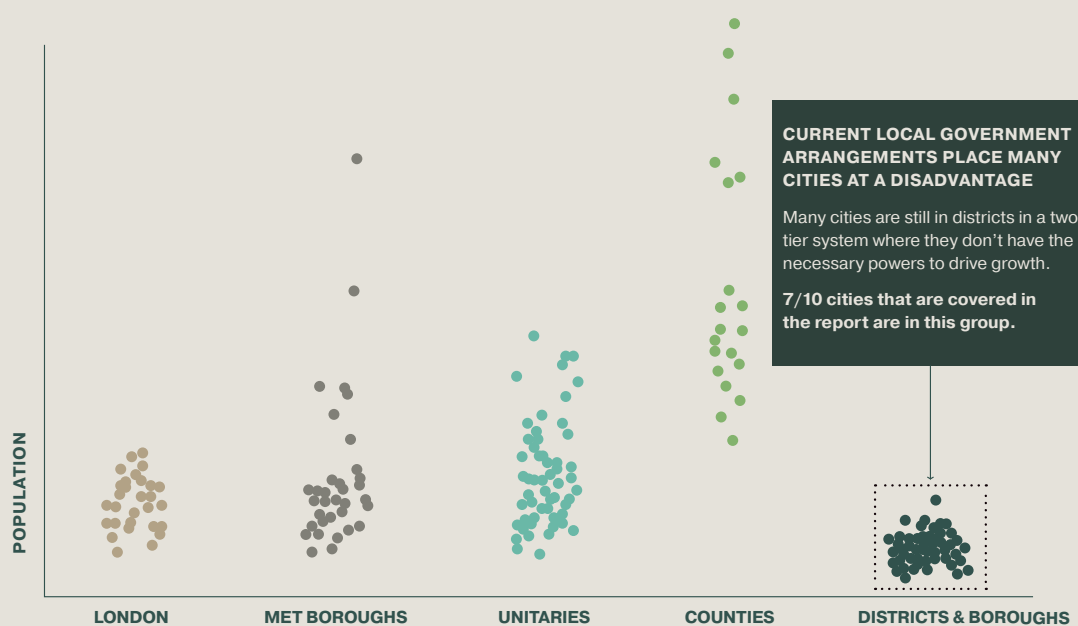
Scaling from national ambitions to local growth

Cities in England are now making the case for HM Government to use this moment to empower them through the creation of city-led unitary authorities – a governance structure that reflects the needs of its citizens through focused, democratic leadership at the right scale.

This is a chance to unlock the full value of past and current commitments: the Industrial Strategy identifies high priority sectors rooted in cities and the Spending Review sets out investment in the infrastructure that connects them. Without local government that is fit for purpose, however, delivery will remain nothing more than an ambition.

Regional government holds primary power around local growth, economy and skills. It needs right-sized, city-led unitary local authorities that can be the driving force to deliver the key projects and programmes to foster the conditions for meaningful change.

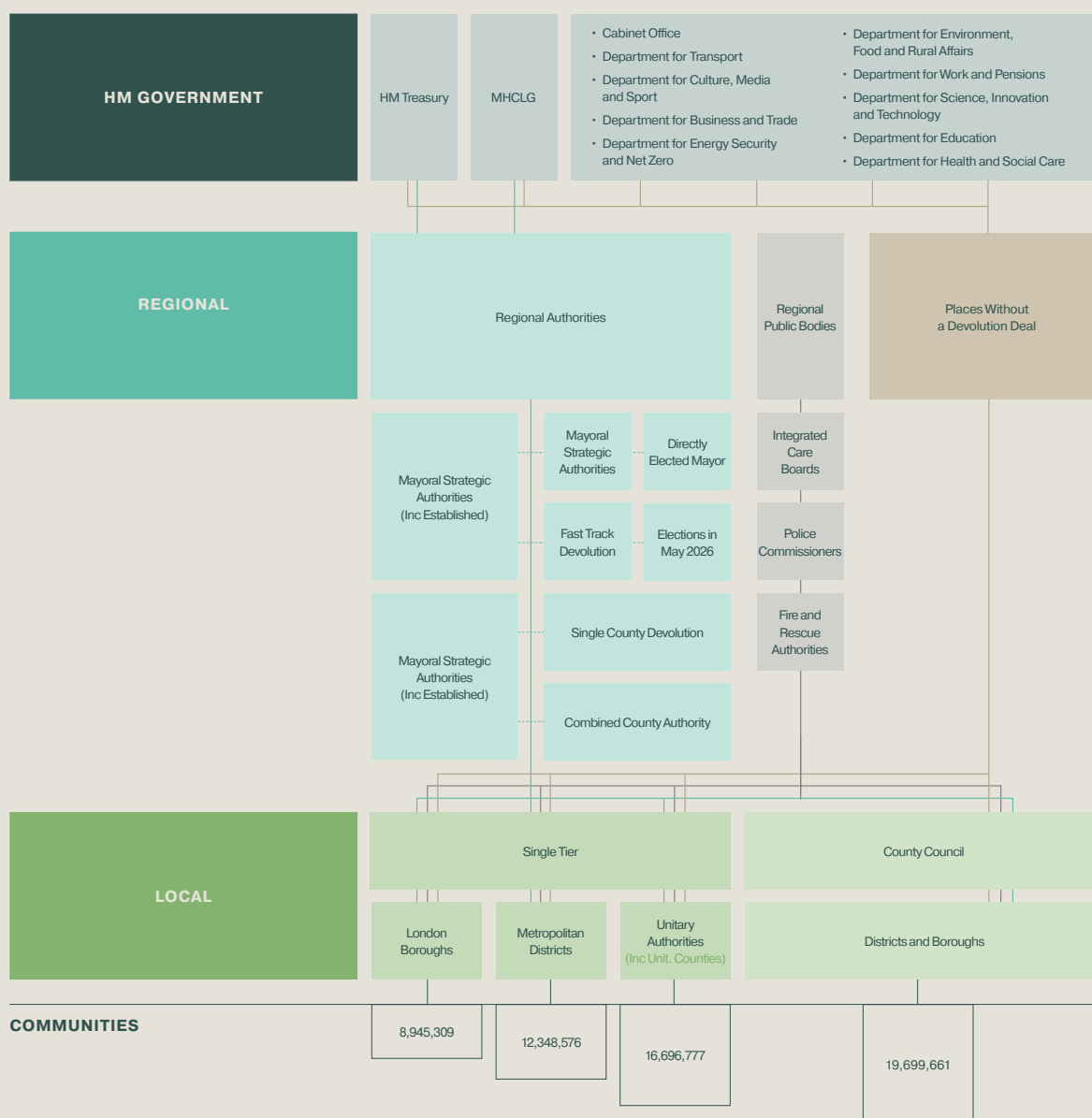
The UK Government's Plan for Change commits to mission-led approach to government. One that recognises fixing the foundations of the economy means fundamental reform to the way government goes about its business.



LGR offers a once-in-a-generation chance to reset local authorities in line with the ambitions of the English Devolution White Paper. Cities, alongside their other regional partners can become equal, accountable partners in devolution, with the powers and scale to compete on a national and global stage – supporting growth that benefits the whole economy.

THE CURRENT STATE OF ENGLISH GOVERNANCE

Cities offer a clear path to greater prosperity - but too many are buried at the bottom of a complex picture of power and governance, which is holding them back.



MAKING THE CASE

Creating a future for English cities within local government reorganisation and devolution

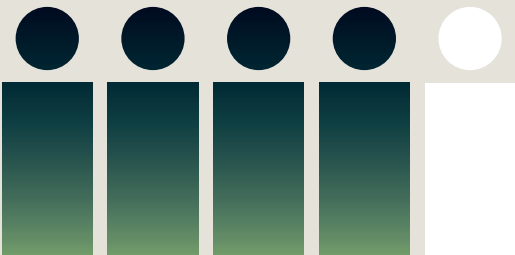
Cities are where most of us make a home. Their streets, schools, homes, and businesses form the places we know intimately. They spin the threads of our lives from study to work and weave human connections that bridge the length of our lives.

Though urban areas represent just eight percent of England’s total land area, some eighty percent of us live in them. Cities shape our regions and environments far beyond their centres. They create patterns that connect places and people and communities. They hold vital clusters of innovation and knowledge that drive regional economies upon which our national growth agenda depends. They offer the chance for conditions in which all can flourish with equal access to opportunity.

Cities are so much more than economic engines. But they face distinct challenges – housing density, infrastructure pressures, deprivation in multiple dimensions, air quality, and transport connectivity. For too long we have concentrated attention and growth in just a handful of metropolitan centres and many other cities have been left without the basic tools they need to realise their potential. This has come at a cost, in the failure to recognise cities as distinct places with the capacity to nurture shared priorities and values, identity and belonging; a failure to understand what different people need and to provide those services.

Addressing these challenges can create a more sustainable path that leads to the right growth, in the right places, while reducing pressures on our network of towns and rural areas. LGR offers a real chance to support and grow a distinct and diverse network of thriving cities, each with an equal voice to represent their communities, going far beyond a ‘lowest common denominator’ approach and instead tapping huge reserves of potential.

Given the right tools and circumstances, cities can support housing growth and investment in public transport, build thriving, varied economies on regional strengths and celebrate the power of the UK’s diversity. These are not abstract ideals. They can be our future.



In England, over 4 in 5 people live in urban areas across networks of cities and towns.



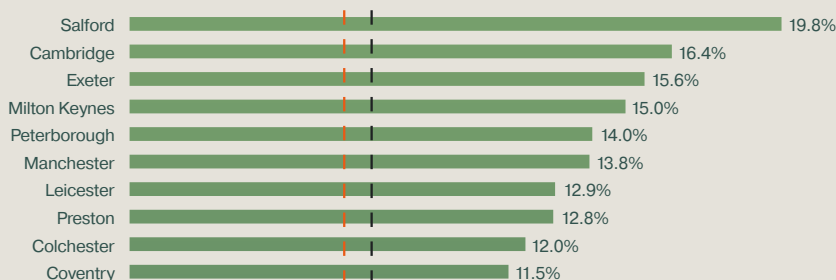
Economic dynamism is not confined to the capital or core cities.

English cities are powering growth and can be empowered to do more. The graphs below illustrate that cities are outpacing national averages in population, employment, and housing stock growth, while places like Swindon and Milton Keynes deliver higher productivity per hour worked than London. Cities are also seeing rising incomes, with strong disposable household income levels growth across regions.

CITIES ARE LEADING THE WAY ACROSS THESE POSITIVE GROWTH INDICATORS

POPULATION GROWTH 2013–2023

-- LONDON (6.6%)
 -- ENGLAND (7.4%)



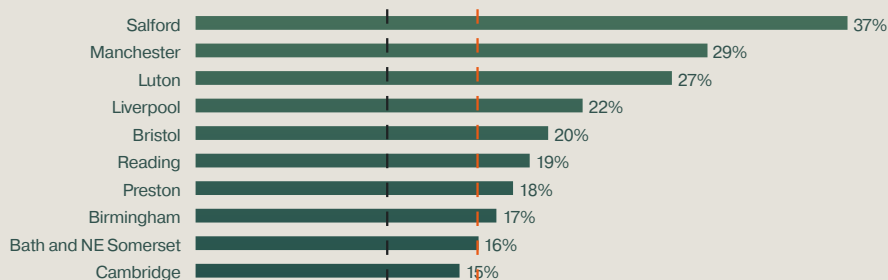
GVA PER HOUR 2023

-- LONDON (£53,96)
 -- ENGLAND (£42,39)



EMPLOYMENT GROWTH 2015–2023

-- LONDON (16%)
 -- ENGLAND (10%)



GROSS DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME PER HEAD 2021

-- LONDON (£32,330)
 -- ENGLAND (£23,338)



MAKING THE CASE

Creating a future for English cities within local government reorganisation and devolution

“National economic growth will only come from increasing the productivity of places across the UK, many of which underperform relative to their international comparators. We cannot be place-blind: we must identify and accelerate the highest-potential opportunities in each, while tackling their specific investment barriers.”

UK Modern Industrial Strategy, 2025

THE UK'S MODERN INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY HIGH POTENTIAL SECTORS PER CITY

These 10 cities have economic strengths that closely align to the government's industrial strategy. They are well-placed to work as constituent members of Mayoral Strategic Authorities to deliver high-value growth and prosperity beyond their borders.

Sectors	Oxford	Cambridge	Norwich	Peterborough	Reading	Ipswich	Gloucester	Swindon	Exeter	Lincoln
Advanced Manufacture	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Clean Energy Industries			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Creative Industries				✓	✓	✓				
Defence		✓	✓	✓			✓			
Digital & Technologies	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Financial services						✓		✓		
Business Services					✓				✓	✓
Life Sciences	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Other	Biotechnology, data science, quantum technology, robotics	AI, advanced engineering, agri-tech	Healthcare, construction, maritime, logistics	Agri-food and drinks, advanced materials, construction, and logistics	Retail, logistics, culture	Port and logistics, tourism and hospitality, culture	Intelligence, security and cybersecurity, digital comms, AgriTech	Logistics, healthcare, automotive, aerospace	Environmental science, healthcare, advanced engineering	Retail, food and beverage

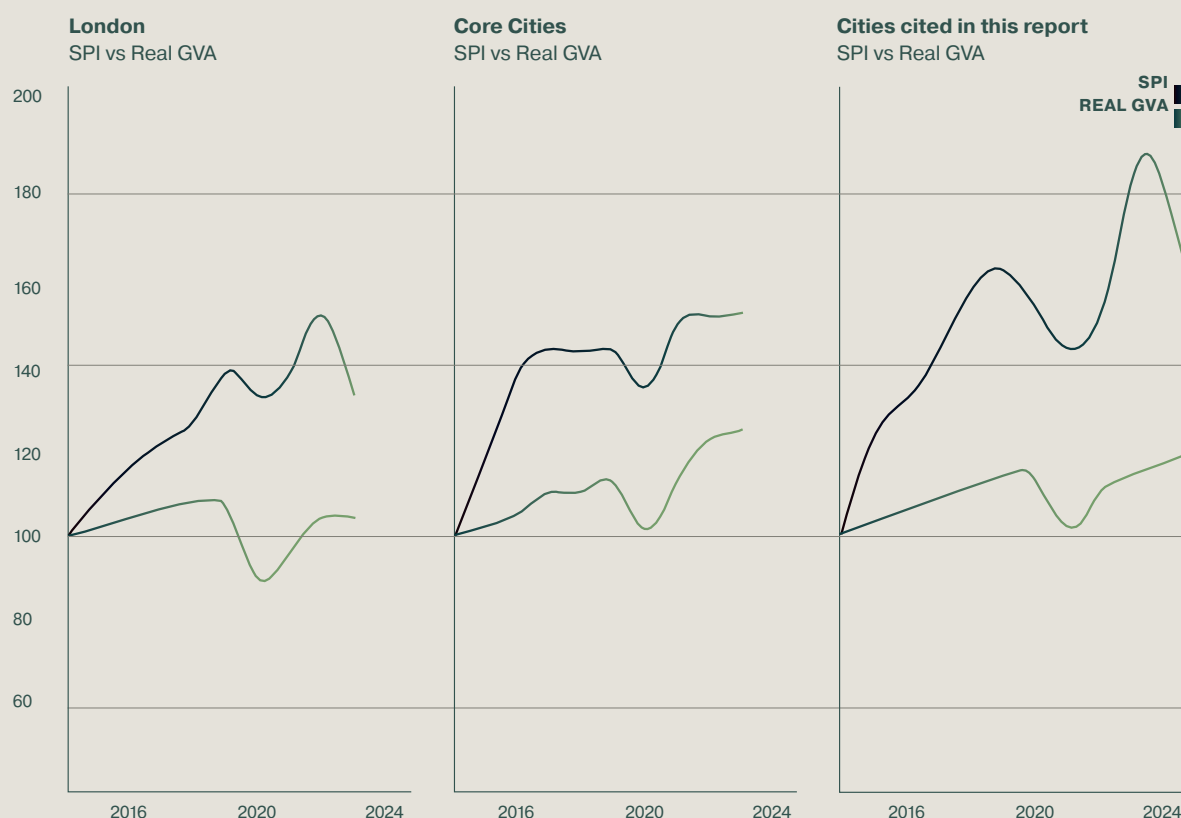
Cities outside of London have demonstrated resilience and potential in driving positive outcomes for their communities beyond growth in GVA.

Inner Circle Consulting's Strategic Place Index assesses performance across 20 metrics relating to economies, local planning and housing, transport and the environment to create a more holistic view about place prosperity than just looking at the growth in economic output alone. It shows contrasting growth trajectories with rising SPI values since 2014 for London and the selected smaller cities pre-pandemic while bouncing back post-pandemic initially until they fall back.

While following a national trend on economic growth, these cities have outpaced London and core cities on both growth and our wider measures of prosperity even in a constrained context.

The trend shows on these wider measures of economic performance, cities outside of London and core cities achieved a higher rate of recovery from external shocks, alongside a greater proportional impact following events such as the global financial crisis, Brexit and Covid-19 pandemic.

STRATEGIC PLACE INDEX ANALYSIS



MAKING THE CASE

Outmoded boundaries, lost voices

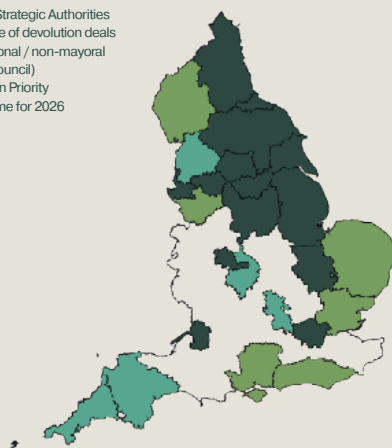
Existing city boundaries are misaligned with the needs of their communities of interest and the places they live in. These misaligned structures reduce efficiency, stifle housing growth, and fragment public service delivery, and force us to live in a democratic deficit. We must use this moment to address this – and reflect the opportunity for cities to plan for growth across a broader urban area, reflecting how people really live, work and move.

In 1972 the Local Government Act redrew local authority boundaries across the England, securing existing boundaries and creating new lines to limit the growth of urban areas. In effect, it marked a line between a city and the communities beyond and created a two-tier structure that diluted the representation of communities in key decision-making.

Fifty years, later, the growth potential of many cities is still dictated by these lines. In Ipswich, for example, the city boundary across 30 square kilometres has remained unchanged since the 19th century.

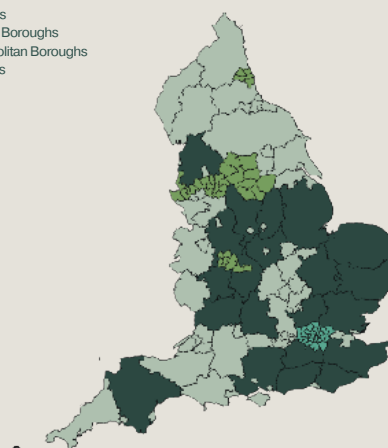
DEVOLUTION DEALS

- Mayoral Strategic Authorities
- Other type of devolution deals (foundational / non-mayoral / single council)
- Devolution Priority Programme for 2026



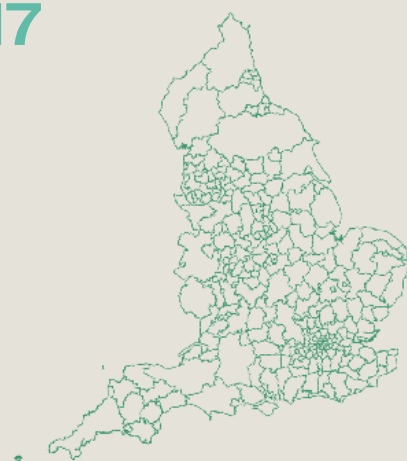
COUNTIES AND UNITARIES

- Counties
- London Boroughs
- Metropolitan Boroughs
- Unitaries



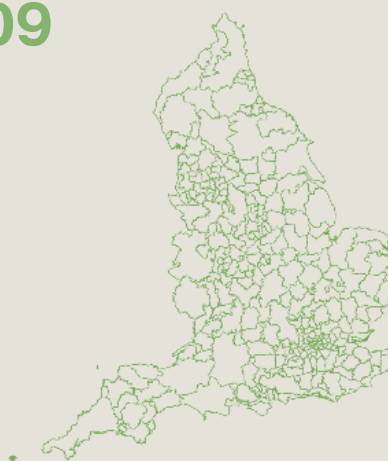
LOCAL AUTHORITY DISTRICTS

317



LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

309





These boundaries - drawn intentionally close to the original urban core in many cities in order to limit growth – undermine both local leadership and a locally led planning system which can only function well if it is considering a place as a whole – if it is right-sized, with the right boundaries - aligned to their true footprint and function.

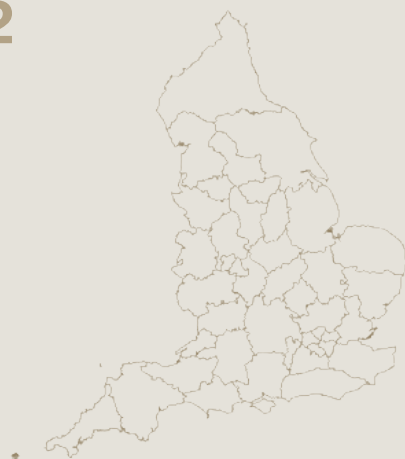
For most cities this situation means they are yet to have the opportunity to represent their potential or to be effective delivery partners for their MSA. While London and the core cities have had a strong voice in the national growth agenda and a seat at the table through their metropolitan areas, there is a long list of cities that have not had the forum to be heard effectively. This comes at a cost to the whole country.

We have lived far too long with artificial divisions across places that do not reflect people's day-to-day lives and needs. When the reach of cities is not reflected in the structure of their local government nor recognised by national policy, our whole system becomes constrained, fragmented and less effective.

The voices of English cities – with all their creativity and potential to address modern challenges – have been lost: the voice of citizens gets lost in a world that doesn't recognise their democratic say, the voice of those who are directly impacted by the decisions of cities but can't participate in decision-making, and ultimately the voices of the cities themselves.

INTEGRATED CARE BOARDS

42



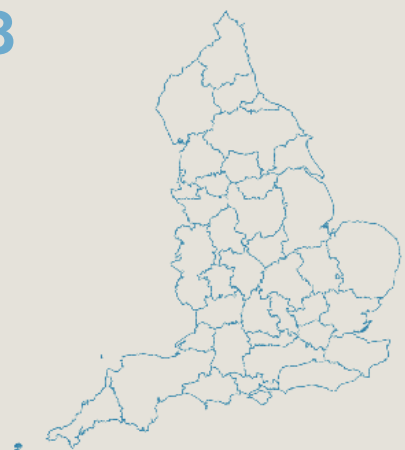
FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITIES

44



LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

38



POLICE FORCE AREAS

39



MAKING THE CASE

Outmoded boundaries, lost voices

For decades, successive Acts of Parliament have layered incremental reforms onto outdated structures, leaving cities constrained by boundaries and powers designed for another century. The legacy of this piecemeal policymaking is a system that manages decline rather than shaping growth.

1972 was when the last major reorganisation of local government happened

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Created the modern two-tier system of metropolitan counties & districts (in big urban areas) and non-metropolitan counties & districts (elsewhere).

Six new metropolitan counties (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, West Yorkshire).

Removed many historic county boroughs (e.g., Norwich, Leicester, Nottingham became part of wider counties).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1992

Established the Local Government Commission for England to review structures.

Led to unitary authorities being created in many areas from 1995-1998 (e.g., Bristol, Leicester, Herefordshire, York, Reading, Plymouth).

This began a piecemeal dismantling of two-tier structures in urban areas.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1888

Created county councils and county boroughs, introducing the first elected councils for administrative counties in England and Wales.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1894

Created urban and rural district councils, adding a third tier of local governance in many areas.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1986

Abolished the six metropolitan county councils and the Greater London Council (GLC).

Their powers devolved to borough/district councils or joint boards.

This began a long phase of centralisation and reduced regional governance.

SCOTLAND ACT, GOVERNMENT OF WALES ACT, NORTHERN IRELAND ACT 1998

Created Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, and Northern Ireland Assembly.

Transferred substantial legislative and policy powers to devolved nations:

England remained without equivalent devolution.



“I did this out of a desire to see that we did not draw metropolitan areas that would encourage a massive urban sprawl from the existing urban areas.

I considered it right to deal with the growth problem of some of our conurbations very much more by developing our regional planning strategies, and deciding where new growth points should take place, rather than just drawing wide boundaries around the metropolitan areas, which could well have resulted in an unnecessary urban sprawl from those areas.

It was an attitude of planning that made me come to that decision to draw the boundaries rather closer than they would otherwise have been.”

Rt Hon Peter Walker MP, Secretary of State for the Environment

GLA ACT 1999

Created the Mayor of London and London Assembly, the first directly elected city leader in England.

Marked the start of English mayoral devolution.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION ACT 2009

Proposal for elected regional assemblies in England defeated (78% voted no).

Ended regional devolution agenda outside London for a decade.

LOCALISM ACT 2011

Introduced new freedoms for local councils, including the General Power of Competence.

NORTH EAST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY REFERENDUM 2004

Proposal for elected regional assemblies in England defeated (78% voted no).

Ended regional devolution agenda outside London for a decade.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION ACT 2009

Established the statutory basis for creating combined authorities and economic prosperity boards.

Aimed to promote local democracy, improve governance, and support economic development.

Laid the groundwork for later devolution deals by enabling groups of councils to collaborate formally on transport, regeneration, and economic development.

MANCHESTER DEVOLUTION DEAL 2014

Greater Manchester Devolution Deal (including a directly elected Mayor from 2017).

MAKING THE CASE

Outmoded boundaries, lost voices

Today our cities are still constrained and contained by decisions made decades ago. This hasn't just led to lost growth, but has created democratic deficits where urban communities are excluded from urban government. What is needed now is not another incremental fix, but a paradigm shift – empowering cities with the tools to address the challenges they face so they can plan, grow and thrive.

EARLY DEVOLUTION AGREEMENTS
2015-2017

Series of bespoke “devolution deals” negotiated with city regions (Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Tees Valley, West of England, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough)

Devolution deals negotiated bilaterally with central government - leading to a patchwork of powers and geography

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE REPORTS 2019

Government pushes for further unitarisation as part of efficiency and growth agenda

LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER 2022

Sets a framework for three levels of devolution deals

“County Deals” for non-metropolitan areas

Reaffirms push for unitary local government in areas seeking Level 3 (maximum powers)

Encourages alignment of boundaries to functional economic areas

CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVOLUTION ACT 2016

Enabled combined authorities with directly elected mayors

Provided powers over transport, housing, planning, skills, some health and social care integration

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL RECOVERY WHITE PAPER (DELAYED) 2019

Signalled intention for more mayors, unitarisation, and stronger place-based leadership

LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER 2022

Sets a framework for three levels of devolution deals

Introduces “County Deals” for non-metropolitan areas

Reaffirms push for unitary local government in areas seeking Level 3 (maximum powers)

Encourages alignment of boundaries to functional economic areas

“If you want to grow cities to drive our national economy – do not lose the opportunity to turn the dial on cities, drive mission growth for the rest of this government and beyond.”

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Oxford City Council

ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER: “POWER AND PARTNERSHIP: FOUNDATIONS FOR GROWTH” 2025

For the first time Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation come together within one strategy

Key provisions and structural guidance included via the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, introduced on 10 July 2025

Establishes a framework for more devolution with new strategic authorities, guidelines for restructuring two-tier areas into unitaries and creation of the Mayoral Council for England

DEVOLUTION PRIORITY PROGRAMME 2025

In February 2025, the government introduced the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), fast-tracking six regions toward Mayoral Strategic Authorities by May 2026. The selected areas are:

- Cumbria
- Cheshire & Warrington
- Norfolk & Suffolk
- Greater Essex
- Sussex & Brighton
- Hampshire & Solent

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION 2025

Local Government Reorganisation commences, impacting all county and district areas, in addition to neighbouring unitaries

NEW COMBINED AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCED 2023-2024

Deals agreed for new CAs in North East, East Midlands, York & North Yorkshire

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY 2025

Published on 23 June 2025, marking a 10-year national growth plan to drive investment in eight high priority sectors (known as the “IS-8”) and strengthen the role of R&D and industrial policy in regional growth

Accompanied by sector-specific plans in July–August 2025, covering life sciences, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital, creative industries, and more

Emphasises regional clusters, devolution delivery structures, and aligning immigration and workforce policy with economic priorities

DEVOLUTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACT 2025

MAKING THE CASE

How right-sized cities can deliver balanced growth and future-proof public services

The Devolution White Paper, along with the Government's Industrial Strategy and the funding flowing from the Spending Review, marks a new long term ambition for England. This ambition offers a rare chance to lift the barriers holding back many of our cities – but doing so demands disruption to the status quo.

Right-sizing city boundaries can deliver better outcomes and democratic accountability, ensuring growth happens in the right places, delivering on the things that we fundamentally need and hold dear in our local places, and preventing crisis for the most vulnerable in society.

When cities are enabled to deliver they allow for the allocation of capacity and focus across all areas. Towns and rural areas then benefit too – able to form stronger local economies and affected less from displaced demand that aggravates tensions, and detracts attention from delivery.

Cities can also be stronger collectively than they are individually. Rather than competing against each other, cities across England could better compete with their global counterparts and capitalise on unrealised opportunities. Our European counterparts show that a polycentric model – a network of empowered, connected cities - works. It delivers balanced and resilient growth. It enables a more resilient public sector. It allows different places to develop their own strengths and to lead the way in different sectors. It also enables cities to lead in service reform.

Cities can ensure prevention of crisis in their most deprived and vulnerable areas by devising and delivering frameworks for better lives lived well from the start. They can deliver integration, and innovation at scale. Many already are doing this. With the right support they have the potential to continue to deliver excellent, innovative, preventative services across a wider footprint and better integrate public services. With the right scale comes real impact and ongoing capacity-building.

Cities can be the trusted delivery partners in each existing and future MSA, representing the needs of urban communities of interest – capable of leading delivery and convening partners to nurture regional growth and shared prosperity.

All of this can happen when cities are governed by an enabled and democratic local government.



**“ Give us a voice at the table
to drive the dynamism
of our region ”**

Bindu Arjoon, Chief Executive
Exeter City Council

MAKING THE CASE

Lost opportunities – What could go wrong?

We have the chance to set cities on a course for growth, if we get this moment right

The Government's current approach to LGR risks not recognising the distinct role that cities have to offer. There is a strong chance therefore that new boundaries will be drawn based on accounting measures that reflect an already failing system, rather than the opportunity for change, leaving cities to stagger into a new era without the right tools.

A squeezed and straitened local government sphere is often driven by an aversion to risk that seeks tweaks, not transformations. But without a fundamental shift in our approach to governance, there is a chance that we may never realise the opportunity of devolution to power regional economic growth and investment.

Without this fundamental shift

We will not maximise the growth we need from opportunities such as the Oxford to Cambridge Corridor, nor pave the way for opportunities to connect cities like Gloucester and Swindon in the west and Norwich and Ipswich in the east.

We will not harness the opportunity to ensure that housing targets and infrastructure keep pace with needs, because the communities to which they are intrinsically linked will still be voiceless.

We will not deliver growth in the priority sectors set out in the Industrial Strategy because we cannot maximise investment across the public and private sector in vital areas like defence and transport.

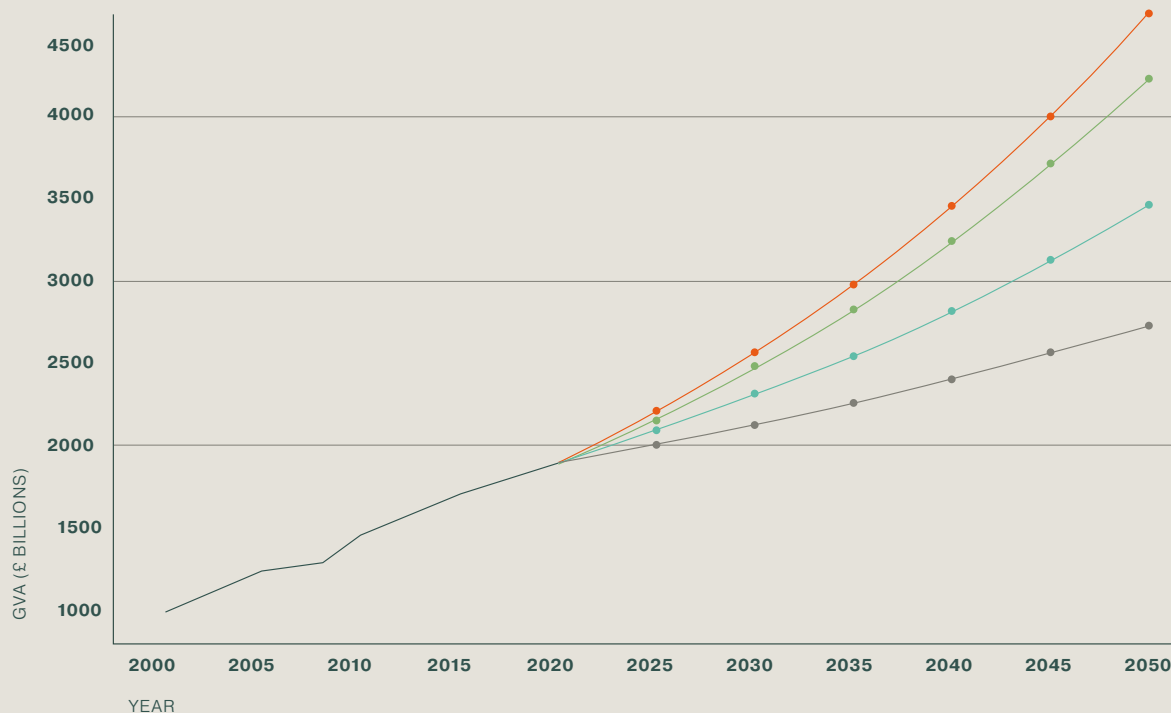
Cities that have been waiting for change, laying the groundwork for change, recognising the potential they might untap should change be offered, will continue to see opportunities for investment pass them by.

These cities will nonetheless keep striving to adapt and innovate, to support communities that have lost a say and in which need continues to grow, to overcome the lack of coherence in how their urban geography can be planned and its daily impact. As they did during austerity and the pandemic, these cities will continue to respond to the grand challenges of the 21st century as best they can. But it could be so much better.

**PROJECTED GROWTH
 UK GVA (£ BILLIONS):**

 HISTORICAL DATA (2000–2020)
 AND GROWTH SCENARIOS

- HISTORICAL TREND – 2000–2020
- PESSIMISTIC SCENARIO – STATUS QUO
- OPTIMISTIC SCENARIO – CITIES EMPOWERED
- TRANSFORMATIONAL SCENARIO – POLYCENTRIC NETWORK
- INCLUSIVE, PREVENTION FOCUSED GROWTH



- ONS, UK small area gross value added estimates, 2022;
- NB: Illustrative projections on growth scenarios

Choices made today will define the future of England's economy

In October 2024 forecast the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasted that total potential economic output is projected to grow by an average 1.5 per cent over 2024 to 2028. The key to addressing this is to deliver the UK's mission of economic stability and growth by empowering cities and regions. The future of England's economy could follow very different paths, and the choices we make today will determine which one.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

An alternative future is within reach

We can choose to create the right conditions for cities to achieve their potential. We can choose bold action and believe in the potential of our cities.

HM Government could take notice of an opportunity in LGR that is within its grasp and back cities to lead, through governance reform, investment and the creation of a long term strategy for cities that speaks to the potential of devolution and reform.

We have the recommendations to help make this happen.

“Allow us to move into the future instead of being held back by the past – then we can play a proper role in delivering missions.”

Helen Pluck, Chief Executive,
Ipswich Borough Council



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations

How we can make it happen

Empower cities through single-tier governance through city-led unitaries

Address the lack of coherence in the structure of local government across the UK. Use LGR to create a new generation of city-led unitaries, distinct from a rural county-unitary – reflecting their functional geography and allowing them to act at the scale necessary to deliver growth, prevention, and innovation.

Right-size cities to match their communities of interest

Use this moment of reform to address misalignment in boundaries so they instead support cities to plan effectively for growth across a broader urban area that reflects how people actually live, work, and move rather than outdated administrative lines.

Commit to a long term national cities strategy

Establish a long term cross-government strategy that recognises cities' role in delivering on key commitments such as the spending review and industrial strategy. Powering economic growth, innovation, Net Zero, housing, and inclusive prosperity.

Back a polycentric England and invest in a network of high-performing cities

End the over-concentration of growth in a few metros by investing in a distributed network of city nodes (e.g. through corridors like Oxford to Cambridge growth arcs), giving a voice and value to cities beyond those which have become the strongest.

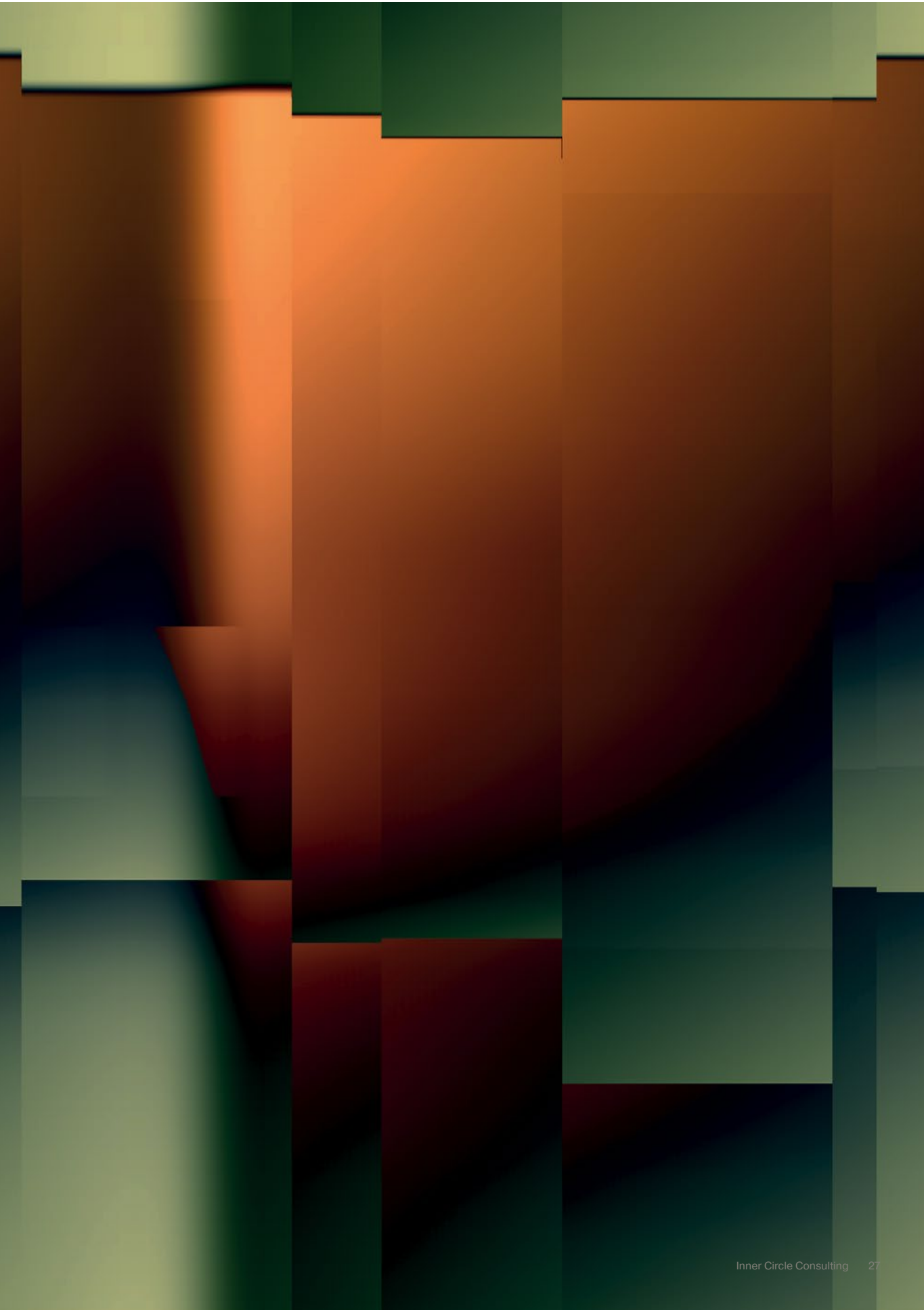
Hardwire prevention into public services at the right scale

Use this moment to reform service delivery, giving cities the power to deliver effectively on prevention by aligning services across health, housing, and welfare at the urban scale, with the data, powers, and partnerships needed to act early.

Recognise city-led unitaries within devolution

The next generation of MSAs will be led by poly-urban areas. Each with distinct identities. Ensure MSAs have strong, empowered city-led unitaries across each region – who understand local needs, can convene partners, and lead delivery. Ensure that all cities – not just large metros – have a seat at the table and access to a Mayoral Combined Authority who has powers, funding mechanisms, and autonomy to drive growth.

CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDIES

People-first cities

The future of cities can be centred around people and their needs. With powers aligned to their true communities of interest, prevention can be built into services and reach those who need it most.

GOVERNANCE & POLICY

It starts here, with cities led by visible, democratically accountable leadership at the scale where people live and work.

Devolved finance and powers will allow cities to invest strategically, balance growth with prevention, and deliver decisions rooted in local priorities. The outcome will be responsive local democracy people can trust, one which drives better outcomes continuously learns, improves and can adapt to future change.

ECONOMY

Cities will power the economy through a strong, network of polycentric cities.

They will attract inward investment, grow high-value sectors, and foster clustering and agglomeration that boosts innovation. This will generate jobs, raise wages and drive productivity that ripples out across their region, fuelling faster national growth and helping the UK compete globally for talent, trade and innovation.

TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Cities will lead clean, modern and reliable transport networks which connect people to opportunity. Getting it right means sustainable connections that cut congestion and emissions, improve air quality and link people to jobs and services across and between cities. Integrated systems will underpin balanced and sustainable growth.

PLACE

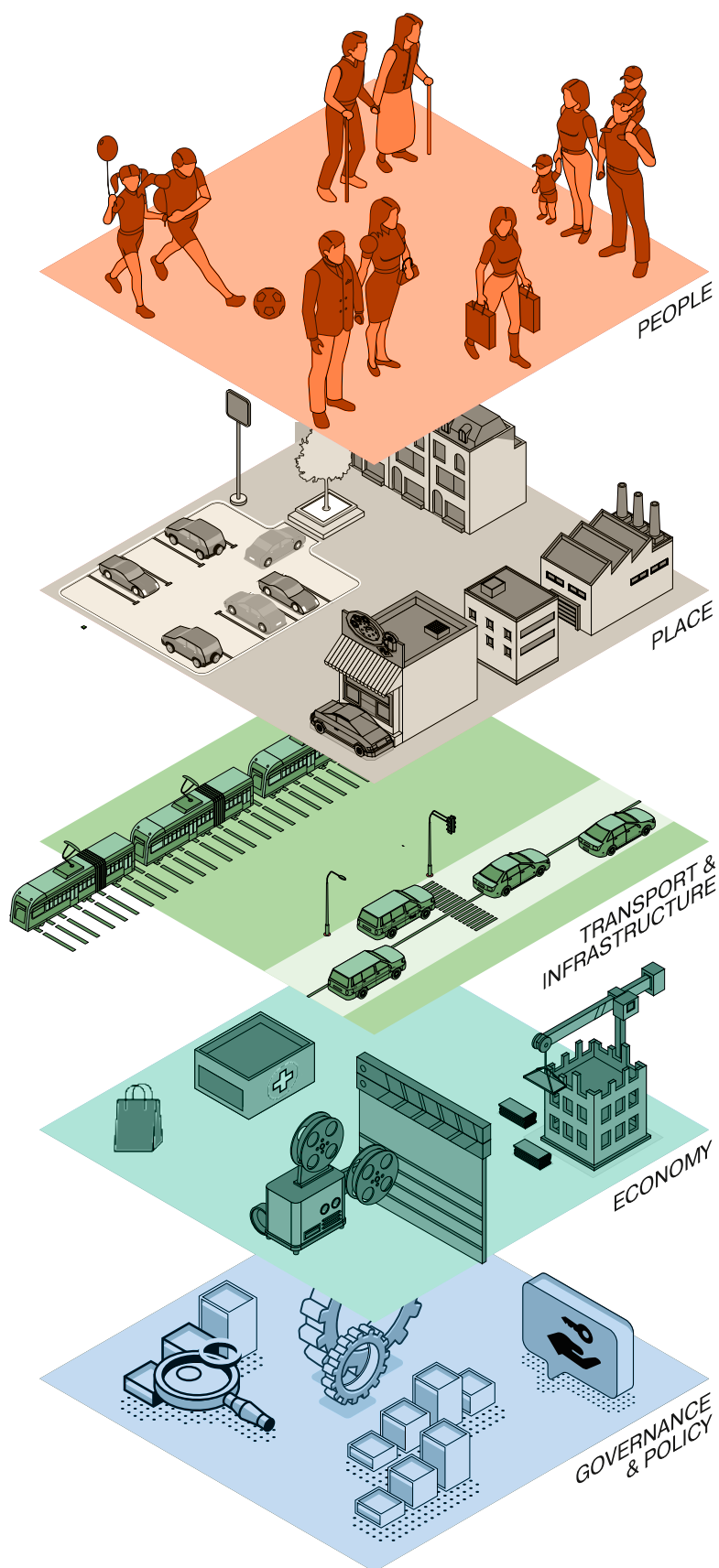
Cities will plan homes, jobs, community and green spaces together, not in silos.

With the powers to shape local places, cities will be able to take a joined-up, place-based approach to revitalising places, delivering affordable homes at pace, and creating better quality, accessible neighbourhoods. Success will mean reduced inequalities across regions, thriving high streets, and places where people and businesses grow side by side.

PEOPLE

Cities will bring together housing, health, education, skills and community to serve the people who have a real stake in them.

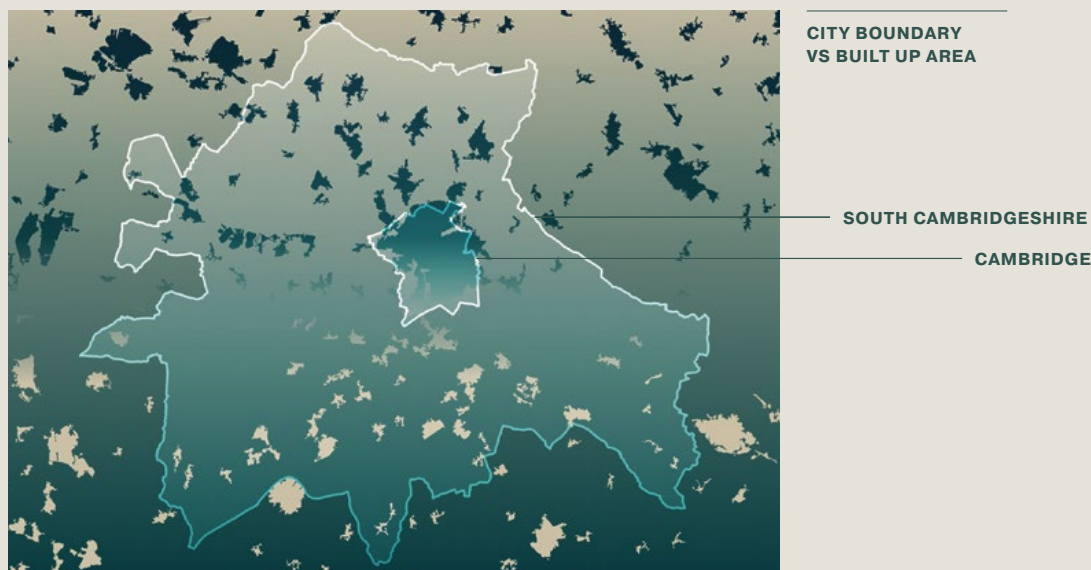
With powers aligned to their true communities of interest, prevention will be built into services to reach those who need it most. Health, housing and community support will be joined up across the urban footprint, supported by the data, powers and partnerships to act early and effectively. The result will be healthier, more resilient communities, with prevention



CASE STUDIES

Cambridge

A new era of inclusive innovation



The UK's long-term competitiveness depends on cities that can match the pace and scale of global leaders, places that create world-class innovation, scale businesses, and partner with investors to plan for the skills of the future, embedding labour market resilience into the national economy while driving local competition. Globally, cities compete not only for investment, but for talent, space, and the ability to scale, conditions that rely on the right governance, infrastructure, and housing in place.

Innovating in high growth Sectors

Greater Cambridge leads Europe in innovation intensity. In partnership with Cambridge University, it attracts global talent, produces breakthrough research and discoveries, and nurtures high-growth spin-outs in R&D, collaborating in sectors from defence, life sciences, to advanced engineering, to AI and technology. As part of the Golden Triangle and Oxford-Cambridge Corridor, the city consistently attracts some of the highest private investment for UKPLC in the UK and has the highest proportion of degree educated residents outside of London.

As a driver of the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Combined Authority, Greater Cambridge plays a central role in attracting investment to grow the regional economy. Investors like Cambridge Innovation Capital lead venture funding across clusters that span the city and wider area, including a recent £100m opportunity fund supporting UKPLC growth.

Delivering the UK's new Industrial Strategy is made possible through cities like Cambridge leveraging their partnerships to continue to grow – but there is potential for so much more.

Connecting innovation to unlock inclusive growth

With spatial inequality rising across the UK, and social mobility in many regions is falling. Greater Cambridge's challenge lies in aligning growth with the needs of its local communities - unlocking better services for residents who face barriers to accessing the economy.

This means planning across housing, transport, education, and other key services so that the benefits of innovation reach those who need them most. Housing supply constraints and high values have made the city unaffordable for many, pushing demand and inequality across the region. With Greater Cambridge's population set to grow by over 25% to 400,000 by 2040, inclusive growth is both an imperative for people in the city and an economic necessity.

Like many cities, Cambridge recognises the potential to drive inclusive growth for an area which reflects the true geography of the urban area. With intent inclusive growth can ensure that investment in the city improves outcomes and addresses inequalities across the urban area and region, delivering more responsive services (particularly for vulnerable groups), co-ordinating infrastructure, and providing better value for money at a time where councils face increasing financial pressures.



Industrial Strategy

“National economic growth will only come from increasing the productivity of places across the UK, many of which underperform relative to their international comparators. The IS-8 are active in every nation and region of the UK, but we cannot be place-blind: we must identify and accelerate the highest-potential opportunities in each, while tackling their specific investment barriers.”

The UK's highest patenting city

308.7 patent applications per 100,000 residents (2021) – highest in the UK and more than twice the rate of any other UK city.

– University of Cambridge

This can be achieved while also creating the conditions for new and growing businesses to scale faster. By delivering 57,000 homes in the city and at new towns of Waterbeach, Northstowe and Cambourne, alongside state-of-the-art labs, science parks, offices, and transport links, the city could retain top global talent, foster spin-outs from its research base, and attract the next wave of inward investment.

The opportunity of right-sizing Cambridge would be felt far beyond Greater Cambridge. Cambridge's innovation economy already generates £80bn in annual turnover; with governance aligned to its true footprint, that figure could grow substantially, driving national GDP, supporting the UKPLC, and creating a pipeline of accessible high-value jobs for decades to come. The Cambridge x Manchester partnership aims to pool knowledge to support start ups and scale ups to support jobs and opportunities. By linking its growth directly to national missions, driving high growth sectors from defence, net zero technologies to life sciences, Cambridge can remain a global leader while powering inclusive growth far beyond its boundaries.

“Cambridge is truly a global city and one of the most innovative and knowledge-intensive in the world. But it needs the right local government reform to ensure the city is not held back from further growth, that it better align services for a rapidly expanding population, and to prevent outdated boundaries from holding back its full potential.”

Cllr Cameron Holloway, Leader of the Council,
Cambridge City Council

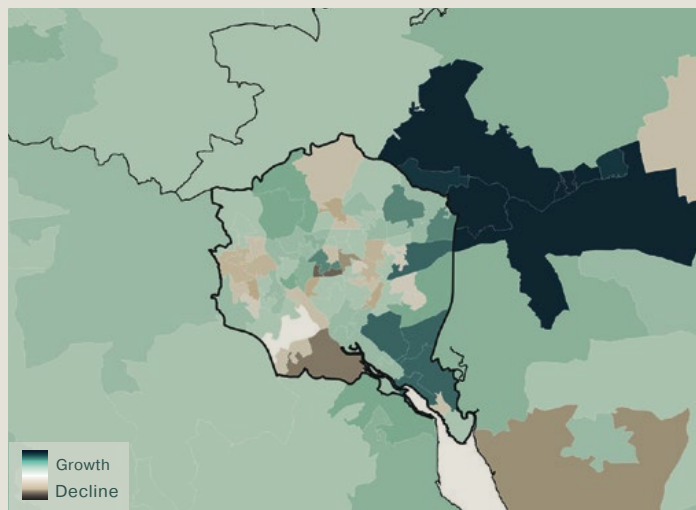
		LQ GVA	LQ Business counts	LQ Employee counts
CAMBRIDGE LOCATION QUOTIENT OF INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY Cities like Cambridge are key to growing high potential industrial sectors. Cambridge's sector specialisms across business count and employment is significant compared to the national average across these sectors	Advanced Manufacture	0.32	2.00	1.56
	Clean Energy	0.78	1.80	1.04
	Creative Industries	1.01	2.09	2.42
	Defence	1.23	3.69	10.01
	Digital & Technologies	1.74	4.73	5.51
	Financial Services	3.09	1.41	0.81
	Life Sciences	2.55	4.75	5.91
	Professional & Business Services	1.26	2.02	1.58

• The Data City

CASE STUDIES

Exeter

Planning for growth



POPULATION GROWTH 2011-2021

- Between 2011 and 2021, Exeter's population grew by 11%
- Meanwhile, areas surrounding Exeter grew by c. 53%
- Areas east of Exeter experienced the highest growth rate, with c. 290%

Cities shape communities across their local area – they manage land use trade-offs, delivering sustainable infrastructure, and working with partners to bring forward good growth. With tightly constrained boundaries and without the powers to act, the result is piecemeal, creating disconnect and failing to address uneven patterns of growth.

Across the UK, growth is spilling beyond city limits into areas with no single accountable authority. On the fringe of cities, new dormitory housing and commercial developments are often car-dependent, and lack services within walking distance. Large scale new housing is often disconnected from jobs. This pattern of growth has come to define the fringe of urban areas across the UK, where new neighbourhoods have become uniform - distinct in their lack of identity, connection to place, heritage and culture.

Within city boundaries, the picture is different but equally challenging: pockets of concentrated deprivation, ageing housing stock, and low levels of investment. Without tackling the structural constraints that drive and reinforce these patterns, the gap will only widen.

Spatial Development Strategies offer a chance to change this regionally - aligning housing and employment growth with transport, sustainability, and placemaking at the scale of functional economic areas. Delivering this requires city-led unitary authorities with the capacity and expertise to shape new and existing communities.

Match boundaries to real communities

Exeter is one of the UK's fastest-growing cities, an economic engine for the South West and a national leader in climate science, health innovation, and advanced research. It is home to the Met Office, Exeter Science Park, and a globally ranked university that contributes over £540 million to the local economy. Exeter's strength lies not only in its institutions and strong partnerships, but in its ability to connect people, places, and ideas, across towns, rural areas, and coastal communities.

With the right powers across the right geography, Exeter will build over 40,000 homes and create inclusive, healthy and sustainable communities.

Homes are being planned on Exeter's fringe - developments that rely on city hospitals, schools, sport, retail and cultural offer, but sit beyond its powers to plan, fund, or integrate effectively. These fringe communities function as part of the city but are disconnected from public transport routes, sitting outside the city's formal reach and leaving no single institution accountable for coordinating investment and place making.

Previous attempts to work together with neighbouring districts on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) failed due to lack of political support, leaving Exeter to concentrate on a brownfield first approach, but without the ability to plan across a true urban geography. However, brownfield land is often unviable and will not deliver enough affordable homes without significant government subsidy and funding for infrastructure.



**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA**

Unlock clean, inclusive regional growth

With the highest patent application rates in the region and national recognition for its net-zero leadership, Exeter is positioned to deliver clean, inclusive growth for the South West. Planning for the right growth, in the right places, will mean investment can be shaped to deliver communities for the future. It could unlock housing, regenerate brownfield land, and scale its innovation economy, benefiting communities across the urban area and beyond.

Exeter is not simply a city - it is a regional connector, a national climate hub, and a driver of shared prosperity. It has delivered, despite structural constraints. With the right powers, it won't just keep pace but lead the way. Back Exeter, and it will deliver for its people, its region, and the future of the UK economy.

“A unitary council that includes the City of Exeter and surrounding areas would deliver a new approach to strategic planning, taking forward the recommendations of the Devon Housing Commission in an enhanced partnership with Homes England and the Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority to deliver a pipeline of large-scale housing sites and a Strategic Housing Plan for Devon”

Bindu Arjoon, Chief Executive
Exeter City Council

**AGE PROFILE OF EXETER
AND ITS' SURROUNDING AREAS**
(% OF RESIDENTS BY AGE RANGE)



CASE STUDIES

Gloucester

Regeneration and placemaking



CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA

Regeneration done well creates lasting value for people and place. It means shaping neighbourhoods where families are proud to live, where local businesses have the space to grow, and where investment strengthens identity as well as the economy. It is the renewal of streets, the creation of homes, and the building of places that reflect the aspirations of the people who live in them. Importantly, regeneration is more than physical transformation—it is a systems approach that integrates housing, infrastructure, and economic development to address grand challenges such as the housing crisis to the cost of living, demographic change and climate resilience.

Cities are the proving grounds for regeneration and placemaking. With the right powers and partnerships, they can overcome decades of underinvestment to deliver vibrant, sustainable neighbourhoods that fuel regional and national prosperity. For Gloucester, regeneration and placemaking have become defining tools for strengthening its economy, unlocking new opportunities and creating places that are inclusive, resilient and connected.

A city focused on renewal

In recent years, Gloucester has proven its regeneration capability and track record through a series of strategic projects. The transformation of Gloucester Docks, led by the Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company, created new homes, public space and a thriving cultural and leisure

destination that has attracted visitors and investment. Building on this foundation, the Council is now delivering ambitious schemes including Kings Quarter and The Forum. New offices, apartments and cultural facilities alongside the University of Gloucestershire's new campus in the former Debenhams building, and the Greyfriars Quarter project are being delivered, supported by Levelling Up funding. To guide and sustain this momentum, a new city masterplan has recently been launched, setting out a long-term framework for housing, jobs, infrastructure and placemaking over the next two decades.

Building the capacity to shape regeneration has been led by Gloucester City Council and was necessary to address the significant challenges facing the city, including the decline of traditional manufacturing and issues with outdated infrastructure. The docks and recent projects are marking a proactive approach to place shaping by reclaiming brownfield sites. The council has taken an active role in overcoming the challenges of regeneration by building consensus, cross-party support and securing the investment needed to revitalise Gloucester.

Scaling regeneration

Gloucester is a historic city in the South West of England with a dynamic and evolving economy. With an economy exceeding £4 billion and home to 5,000 businesses, the city has established strengths in advanced manufacturing, cyber technology, and green industries, with the latter emerging as



Key Statistics

The successes of Gloucester's urban regeneration has delivered the following in the last decade:

£700m+ investment

700 city centre homes delivered

1,000 new jobs created and

2,100 safeguarded

Gloucester is a model for how cities can deliver large-scale, complex projects in a way that respects heritage while creating modern, sustainable places. The capacity built through this programme is now in place, ready to be scaled up across the wider city.

a key growth area in recent years. A strong labour market and well-qualified workforce underpin this resilience, while the city's rich heritage and sustained investment in regeneration continue to strengthen its retail and visitor economy.

Despite some challenges, such as slower job growth and connectivity gaps, Gloucester's strategic regeneration projects are helping attract investment and improve infrastructure. Building on the success of the docks, regeneration must now continue to improve and focus on the city centre – addressing the lack of urban living and growing the night-time economy to deliver prosperity to communities across the city.

Gloucester has already demonstrated what's possible, re-claiming brownfield land, attracting investment, and delivering homes and jobs that changed the city's trajectory. But the task now is to scale this success across the whole city. As a partner in a future MSA and with powers as a city-led unitary authority, Gloucester has the potential to scale this track record at pace to align regeneration with housing, skills, and infrastructure to tackle deprivation, deliver affordable homes, and create spaces for high-growth sectors, in doing so realising a regenerated and thriving city for its residents and driving growth for the regional and national economy.

“In Gloucester we know that regeneration is more than bricks and mortar – it is about renewing communities, restoring pride, and creating neighbourhoods that support prosperity. Empowering cities to lead regeneration and placemaking is not just a governance preference - it is a strategic imperative. Cities like ours must be trusted with the tools and autonomy to shape futures that are locally driven, nationally significant, and globally competitive.”

Jon McGinty, Managing Director
Gloucester City Council

The power of placeshaping

Gloucester City Council is a convening force in the city's place coalition, bringing together public, private, and civic partners to shape regeneration and drive inclusive economic growth. The Council plays a strategic leadership role by coordinating efforts across sectors, leveraging its assets and expertise, and championing the city's long-term ambitions. Its proactive approach includes direct investment in enabling infrastructure, unlocking complex sites, stewarding development that reflects local priorities, and forging strategic partnerships with the private sector.

By collaborating on shared goals such as regeneration, infrastructure, and innovation, the Council helps create an attractive environment for investment, offering streamlined planning processes, co-investing in key sites, and providing tailored support for businesses. Early and consistent engagement with partners ensures public policy is aligned with market needs, while showcasing Gloucester's assets, workforce, and growth potential. In doing so, the Council builds investor confidence, unlocks funding, accelerates delivery, and strengthens the capacity to deliver regeneration at scale in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and locally led.

CASE STUDIES

Ipswich

Unlocking connectivity for national growth

Transport is not just a local service - it's a national enabler of productivity, trade, and resilience. When cities that anchor freight, logistics, and energy infrastructure can't shape their own transport systems, the ripple effects are felt across the economy. Connectivity also drives quality of life: better networks support healthier, cleaner, more liveable cities.

Ipswich sits at the heart of the East of England's economic corridor, strategically located just one hour from London and at the crossroads of the A12 and A14, and the rail junction between the Great Eastern and Felixstowe to the Midlands Main Lines. It connects and delivers services that enable Freeport East and the Port of Felixstowe - Britain's largest container port and a nationally critical trade & energy hub for the rest of the UK. Ipswich's rail infrastructure is central to national ambitions to accelerate net zero through the decarbonisation of logistics and freight - investment in the freight chord has already more than doubled the number of containers which can be conveyed by rail.

Sitting in the UK's clean growth arc, supporting green maritime fuels, offshore wind, and hydrogen, Ipswich's contribution reaches well beyond its formal borders. This network supports thousands of businesses nationwide, from advanced manufacturing to food and drink exports. Fast-tracked devolution for the region will deliver an MSA from May 2026, and with the right conditions in place, this will enhance the voice of the region while attracting investment across growth sectors.

Stalled infrastructure

The A14 is a nationally significant strategic artery that connects international markets through Felixstowe, powering UK PLC, the golden logistics triangle and markets across the UK. The Orwell Bridge carries the A14 over the River Orwell. Every time it closes, whether for weather, maintenance, or incidents, costs the city economy around £1 million per day, bringing traffic to a standstill, pushing HGVs and commuter traffic into the city to a standstill, and affecting businesses and air quality. A proposed relief road could alleviate these pressures, improving reliability for freight and cutting emissions in the city centre. But consultation on the scheme failed to meaningfully involve Ipswich's residents, the very people most affected by the congestion and pollution caused by bridge closures. Instead, decision-making was dominated by voices from outside the city who experience few of the local impacts, skewing the results and ultimately halting progress.

This is the consequence of boundaries that place critical infrastructure decisions outside the hands of those who live with their effects: poorer democratic accountability, delayed solutions, and continuing economic loss.



**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA
2025**



An integrated solution

A city-led unitary, aligned to Ipswich's true economic geography, would enable the city to:

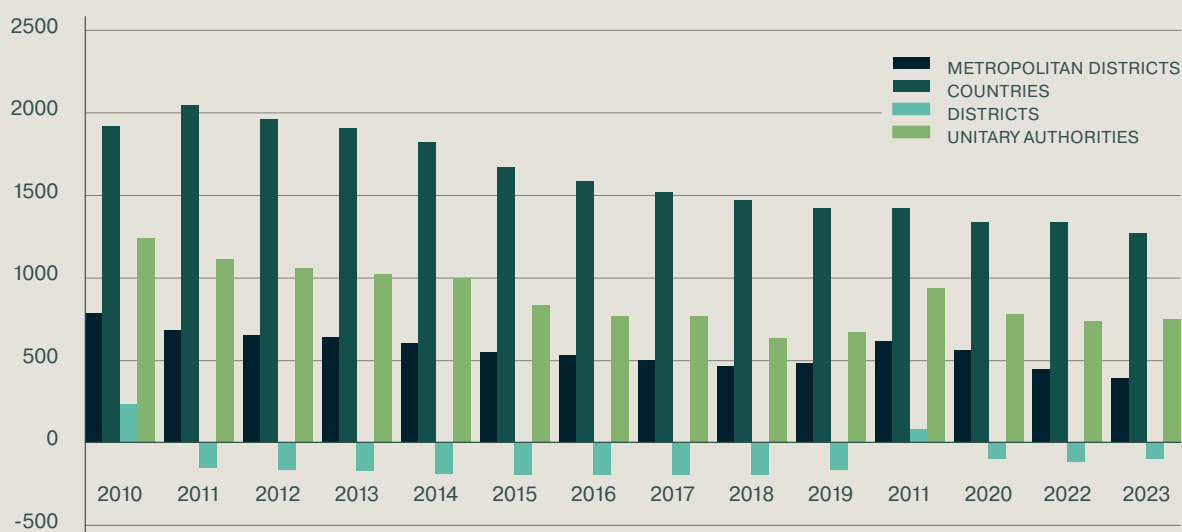
- Lead integrated transport planning across the city in partnership with a future MSA.
- Secure targeted investment to modernise freight routes and deliver long term resilience at the Orwell Bridge.
- Ensure infrastructure consultations are driven by local voices, with decisions reflecting the lived experience of congestion, pollution, and disruption.
- Expand sustainable transport, from electric bus fleets to cycle superhighways, cutting congestion and improving air quality.
- Link housing and employment growth to low-carbon, high-capacity public transport, reducing car dependency.

By aligning economic priorities with transport planning and putting decision-making in the hands of those directly affected, Ipswich could protect its role in national logistics, improve business resilience, and deliver cleaner, healthier streets for residents. This is not only about getting goods to market, but about creating a transport system that is accountable, sustainable, and built for the future.

“Ipswich has the people, the potential, and the position to be a major driver of growth, but only if it has the powers to shape its own future. For too long, decisions affecting the town have been taken by those outside it, with missed opportunities on housing, infrastructure, and investment. Strong, right-sized governance would allow us to plan for growth, tackle inequality, and build a healthier, more resilient population - unlocking benefits not just for Ipswich, but for Suffolk, the East of England, and the UK economy.”

Helen Pluck, Chief Executive
Ipswich City Council

UNLOCKING CONNECTIVITY FOR NATIONAL GROWTH LOCAL AUTHORITY SPENDING POWER ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICES



• : Local Authority Finances, House of Commons Library

CASE STUDIES

Lincoln

Addressing urban outcomes



CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA
2025

Cities concentrate both the worst health outcomes and the greatest opportunities for improvement.

Improving health in cities depends on decisions made beyond the health system – transport, housing, planning, and environment all have critical roles.

Key messages from the Chief Medical Officer’s annual report 2024: Health in Cities

Lincoln is a fast-growing and ambitious city – home to a thriving knowledge ecosystem and boasting a rich cultural and historical identity. However, like many other cities, it is also a place of stark contrasts, where spaces of innovation and growth sit alongside concentrated deprivation and poor health. The UK’s Chief Medical Officer’s 2024 Health in Cities report highlights that urban populations face a unique combination of pressures: higher levels of air pollution, limited access to green space, higher rates of obesity, mental ill health and long-term conditions. These challenges are often entrenched in specific neighbourhoods and limit people’s ability to live well, work, and age healthily.

For Lincoln, the only city in a largely rural county, these pressures are particularly acute. The city anchors services, jobs and education for surrounding towns and villages, while carrying the weight of concentrated deprivation within its boundaries. Life expectancy differs by more than a decade between communities only miles apart, reflecting the persistent link between health, inequality and demand for public services. Without the ability to align housing, health, transport and infrastructure, in many cities these inequalities will persist and constrain growth.

Lincoln’s role at the heart of regional growth

Lincoln has already shown how partnership and targeted investment can change the trajectory of communities. Its neighbourhood working model has successfully brought together voluntary sector partners, housing providers, and public agencies to focus on the determinants of health and wellbeing at local level. This experience provides a foundation to design services that are preventative, joined-up, and responsive to community needs.

In contrast, the city is a hub of economic activity it is a centre of higher education, home to a number of universities and colleges. In key sectors the city sits at the heart of innovative clusters in defence and security, and the creative economy, and with growing digital and technology sectors. The city has potential to accelerate these high-priority sectors to improve productivity, skills and employment across the city and wider region.

However, there are constraints to this economic success. Lincoln’s current boundaries date back to the 1970s which prevent the city from taking action across a functional urban geography. Most employment growth in recent decades has been absorbed by areas like North Hykeham, functionally part of Lincoln’s economy but outside its authority to coordinated infrastructure or long-term planning.



“Lincoln has always punched above its weight, delivering for residents and businesses despite the constraints of a two-tier system. With the right tools, we can go much further — aligning housing, health, skills and infrastructure to meet the needs of our communities and unlock their potential. Our ambition is to create a city where outcomes improve across the board: healthier neighbourhoods, better wages, higher skills, and stronger connections to opportunity. With a right-sized authority, Lincoln can become a model of how small but ambitious cities drive inclusive growth and resilience for the UK economy”

Angela Andrews, Chief Executive and Town Clerk
City of Lincoln Council

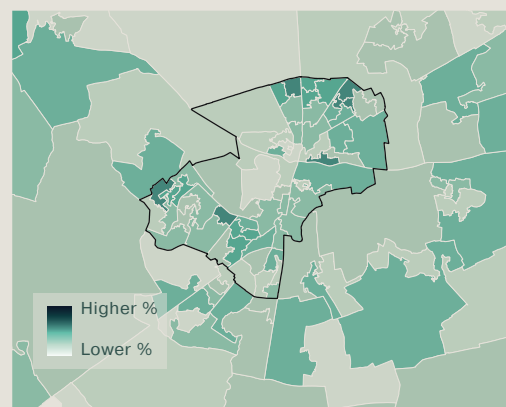
Designing growth for prevention

For Lincoln, improving outcomes sits at the heart of its future across a broader urban geography:

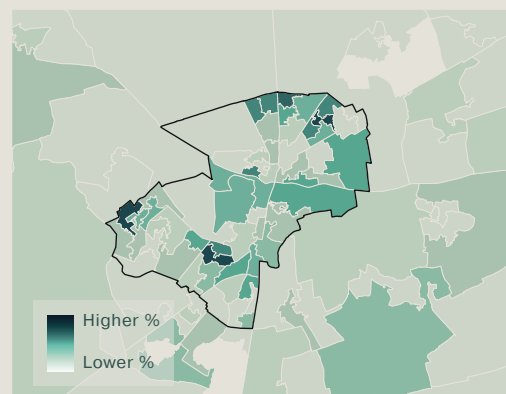
- **Live well** – raising wages, opportunity, and living standards
- **Age well** – shifting from crisis response in care to early intervention and prevention.
- **Reduce inequality** – tackling deprivation and entrenched health inequalities through integrated services.
- **Connect** – improving productivity and growth through coordinated transport and digital infrastructure.
- **Improve skills** – linking education to higher-value jobs in a modern economy.

With a right-sized unitary, Lincoln could better coordinate across housing, transport, and health systems, accelerate the delivery of affordable homes, and plan infrastructure that serves both city residents and surrounding communities - This would allow the city to deliver on its role as a growth engine for the region while directly improving life outcomes for those who need it most.

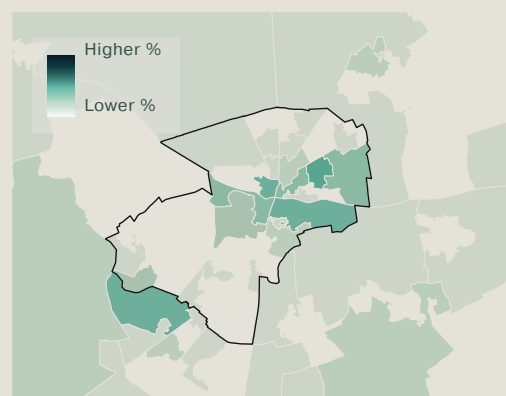
For Lincoln, the opportunity is to build on what works locally and extend it across a functional geography. With the right tools to align housing, health, skills and infrastructure, the city can better address the root causes of poor outcomes while supporting growth in high-value sectors. Addressing this is dependent on giving cities the right powers across the right-size geography - with this they can shape the city to deliver healthier homes, walkable neighbourhoods, and integrated health and social services - create inclusive growth and resilient local systems which become the foundation for hard-wiring prevention into our public services.



MAP 1: HEALTH
PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS REPORTING BAD AND VERY BAD HEALTH, BY LSOA (2021), ONS (Census 2021)



MAP 2: DEPRIVATION
PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS DEPRIVED BY 3 OR 4 DIMENSIONS, BY LSOA (2021), ONS (Census 2021)

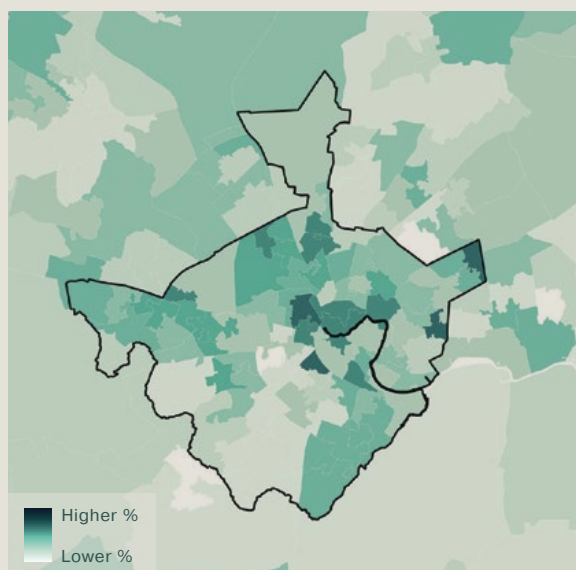


MAP 3: EMPLOYMENT
EMPLOYMENT COUNT BY LSOA, 2023, ONS (Business Register and Employment Survey)

CASE STUDIES

Norwich

Putting communities at the heart of decision-making



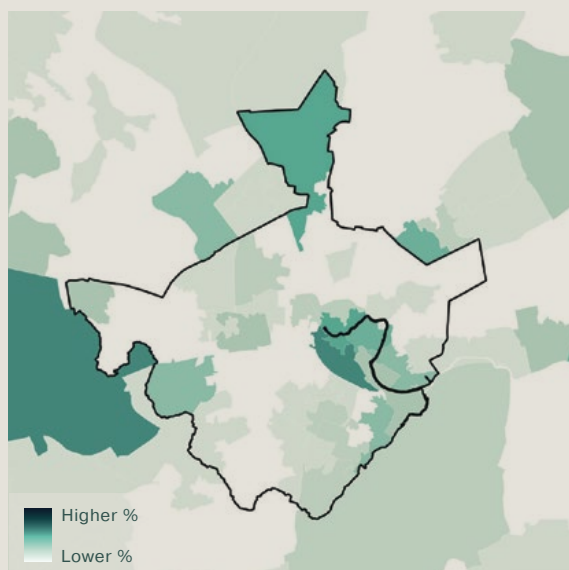
ECONOMIC INACTIVITY 2023

The spatial distribution of outcomes and opportunity in Norwich varies across the city, reflecting patterns which can be seen across every city in the UK. Areas of highest economic inactivity sit adjacent to areas of highest GVA with high concentration of businesses - but the boundary intersecting these areas inhibits the ability to coordinate, or to connect opportunity to communities, ONS (Business Register and Employment Survey)

When communities have a voice, it mobilises participation, builds social ties, and creates a web of accountable structures, from local leadership to neighbourhood groups. This is the foundation for trust, confidence, and local pride. Yet many of our cities are facing a democratic deficit.

Strong local democracy depends on governance that matches the places people identify with: where they live, work, and travel. In Norwich, residents want a stronger voice and clearer accountability – but outdated boundaries dilute representation, and weaken the public's trust in decision-making

Devolution will only succeed if it is built from the ground up, empowering communities to shape their places. Without this participation, new governance structures risk being seen as remote and disconnected from the lives or people.



EMPLOYMENT

% Of residents (aged 16+) economically inactive due to long term sickness or disability (2021), ONS (Census 2021)

The principles for this are set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which calls for Local Authorities to create effective neighbourhood governance and stronger community voice.

Building participation from the ground up

Norwich, a city steeped in a proud history of science, arts, and innovation, stands as a unique civic and economic centre within a predominantly rural East of England. Often described as an “island economy”, its distinct character, specialised sectors, and self-reliant partnerships have fostered a unique blend of strengths for a city of its size. Also, initiatives like Norwich's 2040 City Vision (2018), the “We Are Norwich” Community-led Plan (2024), and the Norfolk Roadshows have given residents a direct role in shaping priorities, and have



**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA**

“Norwich has the ambition, partnerships, and track record to drive growth for the whole region. With governance that reflects the city people actually live and work in, we can unlock greater opportunities – delivering better services, more homes, and giving every community a stronger voice, a clearer identity, and a fairer say in the decisions that shape their future.”

Louise Rawsthorne, Chief Executive
Norwich City Council

The Opportunity to Connect Urban Communities

Reorganisation is a chance to deliver differently. A new Greater Norwich Unitary Council would create a single, accountable body that reflects the city’s true footprint and identity. By bringing decision-making closer to the people who live, work, and travel in and around Norwich, it would bring stronger accountability, clearer representation for communities, and would give residents a clearer voice and a fairer say in shaping their future.

This change could also drive growth and deliver significant savings, unlocking around 26,000 new homes, supporting 50,000 more residents within the local plan period, generating £31 million in Council Tax and £2–3 million in New Homes Bonus each year, and achieving £10–13 million of annual service savings.

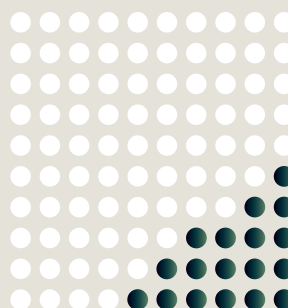
A city-led unitary authority for Greater Norwich is not merely an administrative adjustment; it is an opportunity to restore trust, strengthen local identity, and ensure that the benefits of growth directly translate into better outcomes for local people across the region.

laid the groundwork for an economy built on community, the environment and with inclusion at its heart.

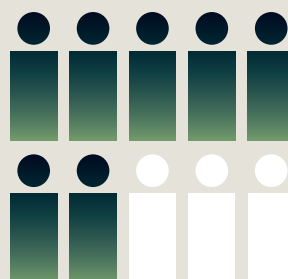
The £9.9 billion Greater Norwich economy supports 158,000 jobs and 10,500 businesses, it’s economic dominance in the east of England attracts investment which has ripple effects across the UK economy. Since 2010, it has outpaced the economic growth of larger UK cities, with a 64% increase.

Despite these strengths, Norwich’s growth potential remains curtailed by its existing boundaries: over half (54%) of Greater Norwich’s GVA and 47% of its jobs are beyond the city council area, creating division, diluting accountability, and limit the city’s ability to act on the issues that matter most to people. While fringe communities – such as Hellesdon and Trowse – are excluded from decisions on the city they identify with.

Public engagement has consistently highlighted confusion with the current two-tier system – with residents often with different councils for different services – and underscored a clear desire for a more streamlined local government. Stakeholders widely support a unitary authority to eliminate duplication, improve coordination, ensure equitable allocation of resources, and enable simple, more accountable decision-making.



Only 18% of residents across Great Britain find it easy to understand ‘who does what’ in local government



7 out of 10 people say they know little or nothing about how local government is structured

CASE STUDIES

Oxford

Matching ambition with the right tools to deliver

The importance of getting housing and infrastructure right for the next generation cannot be underestimated. In every corner of the UK, there is a fundamental need for an affordable supply of quality housing with a range of tenures. This needs to be delivered alongside space for innovative sectors to scale to drive the national economy, while also protecting and nurturing vital social and green infrastructure.

Cities are the test beds for balancing the needs of people, place and planet, with partnerships and the critical mass already in place and populations which are poised to grow if they have the space to do so. Delivering this requires intentional design, enabling cities to plan coherently to balance their distinct needs.

Oxford is globally recognised, home to the world's No.1 university and some of the UK's most transformative breakthroughs. Steeped in centuries of scholarship. The city excels in life sciences, biotechnology, data science, quantum technology, and robotics, forming a strong technology cluster, that drives regional growth. Oxford's two universities generate well over £16bn wider economic impact per year to UKPLC.

Yet decisions critical to Oxford's future, housing, transport, and infrastructure are fractured across city and county lines, and underpowered in the absence of an MSA to provide the enabling infrastructure that could unlock critical infrastructure.

One city, two realities

Oxford's global reputation tells only half the story. Behind its global status lies a stark contrast: a third of households in Oxford experience at least one form of deprivation. Life expectancy varies by more than a decade between neighbourhoods mere miles apart.

Bringing together housing, health, care, education and skills to tackle problems at their roots and raise the aspirations of all residents allowing the city to move from reacting to crisis toward building resilience and opportunity.

“Oxford is primed and ready to grow, with the infrastructure and economy of scale in place to create new homes at pace, space for businesses to grow, opportunities for investment, places for families and communities to connect”

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Oxford City Council

OXFORD'S GROWTH MISSIONS

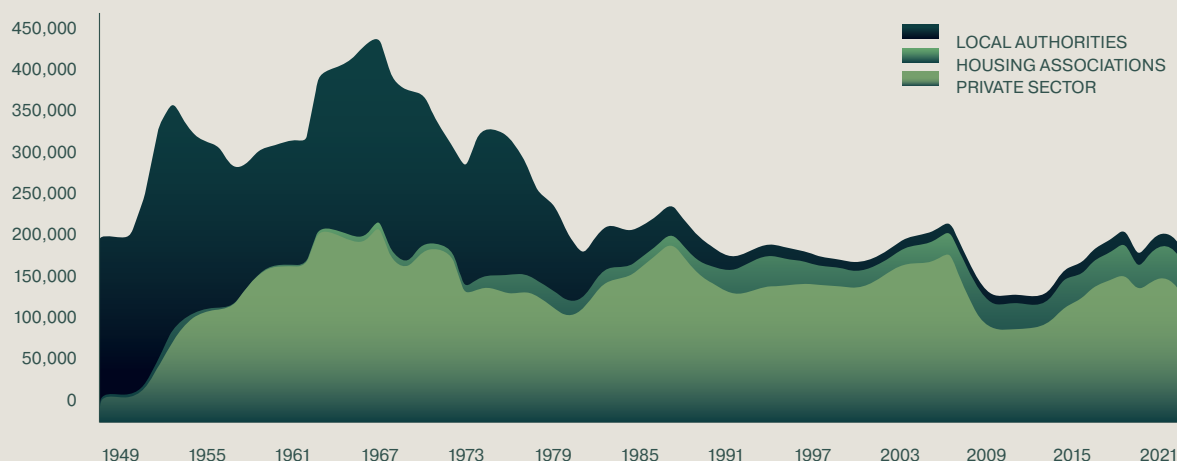
- Enabling the rapid expansion of Oxford's key knowledge economy sectors to create a globally significant ecosystem
- Accelerating housing delivery to unlock the economy, tackle ingrained inequality and reduce strain on public services
- Empowering communities in Oxford and its surrounding area to benefit from regeneration and a more innovative approach to public service delivery
- Providing a powerful voice at the Mayoral Strategic Authority table to ensure delivery of central Oxfordshire's wider infrastructure needs.

**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA**



**HOUSE BUILDING 1949 – 2024
COMPLETIONS BY SECTOR**

While supply is far from the only issue facing the UK housing market, enabling Local Authorities to build more homes is key to meeting the Government's target of building 1.5 million homes.

**A focus on delivery**

A right-sized urban-led unitary would give Oxford the tools to act with intent, delivering growth across four distinct mission with clarity and pace.

Equipped across a geography which reflects the urban community and powered by a future MSA for the region, a Greater Oxford Council would cover Oxford and the communities within its Green Belt that are naturally linked to the city by work, transport and leisure, enabling carefully shaped development, not sprawl. Transport decisions would no longer be made at a distance. A modern, integrated network could finally take shape, cutting congestion, boosting access, and matching the scale of local need.

Oxford can deliver up to 40,000 new homes by 2040 - 40% of them genuinely affordable - create 29,000 new jobs, and add £2bn to the UK economy every year, driving better outcomes across the region. Homes, workspaces, infrastructure and services would be planned together, not in silos. By building homes where jobs are, Greater Oxford would create growth that's clean, compact and connected, supporting net zero while preserving green space.

Oxford already drives major returns for the UK economy but given the ability to plan and deliver as one place, with clarity, accountability and pace, it could do even more - giving Oxford the tools to match its ambition, so that innovation, sustainability and fairness work hand in hand.

CASE STUDIES

Peterborough

Renewal through prevention



**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA
2025**

Peterborough is one of the UK's fastest-growing cities, with clusters in Defence & Intelligence, Life Sciences, and Advanced Manufacturing that make it a natural driver of regional growth. Acting as a hub for surrounding rural areas, it has seen major developments like Fletton Quays and Northminster, new strategies for inclusive growth and better jobs, and partnerships with Homes England and the Combined Authority - all providing a strong foundation to build on.

To turn this potential into lasting change, Peterborough needs the right tools and structures – while the city is growing fast, so are the pressures on public services.

Responding to demand and change

Public services across the UK face rising demand and stretched budgets. Without the ability to coordinate prevention at the right scale, cities can be locked into a costly cycle of crisis response rather than tackling root causes.

Devolution has brought investment in housing, infrastructure, and skills, but in many places it has not changed how services are delivered day-to-day. Fiscal devolution also remains limited, with the UK still one of the most centralised countries in the OECD, while local authority spending on social care, SEND, and temporary accommodation continues to rise - from £60.0bn in 2015–16 to £72.8bn in 2023–24 (NAO, 2025) – reflecting growing pressures.

Communities under pressure

Despite progress, many communities in Peterborough face entrenched challenges: low skills and earnings, stagnant economic opportunity, rising inequality, and a widening gap in health and wellbeing. Parts of the city sit within the most deprived deciles nationally, with higher-than-average demand for social care, housing support, and children's services.

Local services work hard to respond, but fiscal restraint and fragmented governance often force a focus on crisis management rather than prevention. This is costly - financially, socially, and economically – and it undermines public confidence in the institutions meant to serve them. Without change, Peterborough risks remaining locked into arrangements that neither meet local needs nor contribute fully to national priorities.

Right-sizing for prevention and growth

A right-sized, city-led unitary authority would bring together the levers for housing, health, education, skills, and economic development under one accountable body.

This would enable Peterborough to:

- Design and deliver targeted, preventative services, reducing long-term demand on acute care, improving outcomes, and lowering costs.



- Drive inclusive economic growth, building on its strategic location and diverse workforce to attract investment and create jobs.
- Align housing delivery with infrastructure and skills, ensuring growth meets the needs of both new and existing residents.
- Restore public trust through clearer accountability and decision-making that reflects the lived reality of local communities.

The benefits go far beyond short-term savings. Growing the local economy, delivering the housing the city needs, preventing future demand for public services, and rebuilding trust in local government all create far greater returns to the public purse.

Peterborough's future lies in renewal, building the capacity, confidence, and resilience of its communities. With the right-size, the city can shift from managing crisis to enabling opportunity, becoming not just a fast-growing city, but a fair, healthy, and prosperous one that contributes meaningfully to regional and national success.



£42.3 billion spent by local authorities on adult and children's social care in 2023-24

NAO 2025

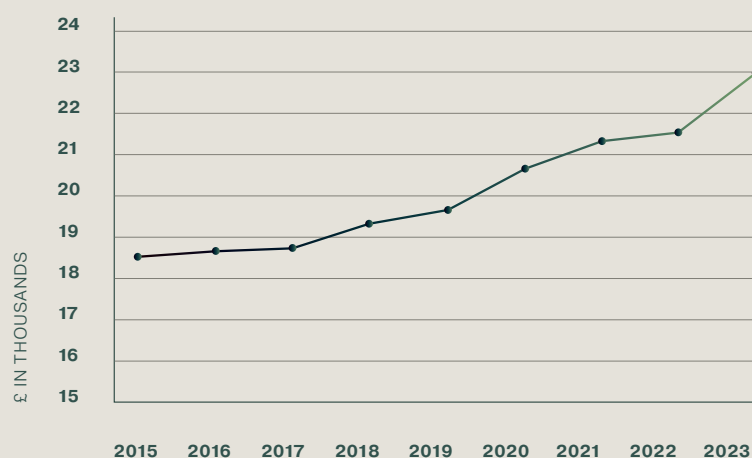


42 Local Authorities receiving **exceptional financial support** since 2011

“Peterborough has the scale, diversity, and ambition to drive growth and improve lives – but we need the powers, resources, and accountability to match our role. Without aligning governance to our real economy, we’re stuck managing crises instead of preventing them. With the right structures, we can deliver better services, stronger communities, and growth that benefits the whole region.”

Matt Gladstone, Chief Executive
Peterborough City Council

**NET CURRENT EXPENDITURE
IN ADULT SOCIAL CARE BY LOCAL
AUTHORITIES (ENGLAND)**



• NHS England



£2.13 billion spent on temporary accommodation by local authorities in 2023-24; this is **nearly double** what was spent in 2015-16

NAO 2025, ONS

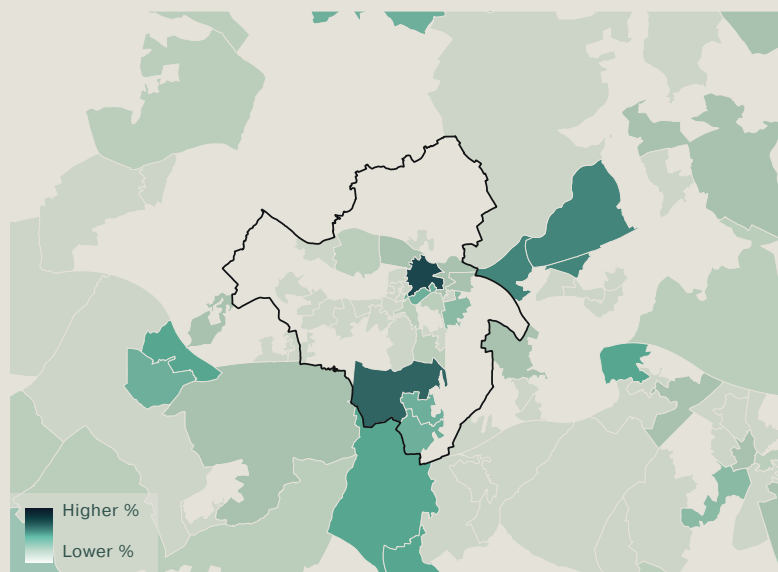
Local authorities faced a **£200–800 million annual gap** between SEND high needs spending and funding (2018–22), resulting in **£3.3 billion of accumulated deficits** by 2024

Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2024

CASE STUDIES

Reading

Densification and potential as a unitary



ECONOMIC OUTPUT

GROSS VALUE ADDED (GVA)
BY LSOA, 2022

- ONS (Small area gross value)

READING OUTPERFORMS THE NATIONAL AVERAGE ON KEY METRICS

- Population growth 10.3% between 2013 and 2023, compared to 6.6% in London and 7.4% in England.
- Productivity £48.5 (GVA per hour 2023), compared to £42.4 in England.
- Employment growth 19% between 2015 and 2023, compared to 16% in London and 10% in England

Getting density right is about more than housing numbers – it is about attracting investment to shape vibrant, liveable neighbourhoods where communities thrive and businesses and institutions cluster - it creates dense networks of knowledge, skills, and innovation that drive growth. Density at the right scale is what makes public transport viable, what allows housing and services to be delivered efficiently, and what turns a collection of firms into a thriving cluster or innovation ecosystem. For cities, it is the foundation of productivity, resilience, and long-term prosperity.

Compared to global competitors, UK cities are less dense – a legacy from our approach to urban planning, regulation, and housing system. The result is lower productivity, missed opportunities for clustering, and a system that struggles to deliver the homes and infrastructure people need. Unlocking this means unlocking the benefits of agglomeration: connected, sustainable cities that power local prosperity and the national economy.

Building on Reading's track record

As a unitary authority since 1998, Reading has demonstrated what's possible when urban areas have the tools to act. It has become one of the UK's most dynamic and fastest growing economies, consistently ranking among the top five urban areas for productivity. While Reading does not hold formal city status, it functions at economically and functionally at city scale, with a population of more than 230,000 across its wider

footprint and anchoring prosperity across the Thames Valley and the South East.

Reading boasts a thriving knowledge economy, powered by the University of Reading, and is home to major global employers including Microsoft and Oracle, alongside a flourishing start-up scene and cultural offer. Reading also boasts exceptional connectivity, with one of the busiest rail stations in the country, served by the Elizabeth Line and supported by a growing network of sustainable transport infrastructure.

With limited land, Reading has led on compact, sustainable development – focusing growth in its dense, well-connected town centre. Major regeneration schemes like Station Hill, Minster Quarter, and Broad Street Mall are set to than double the number of homes in central Reading by 2041.

The opportunity of right-sizing

Reading's potential is held back by outdated 1911 boundaries. The Centre for Cities defines Reading's Primary Urban Area (PUA) as extending into surrounding areas, reflecting the reality of where people live and work. Over half of the functional population and workforce are outside the borough, yet housing, transport, and health planning remain fragmented.

This mismatch means growth risks becoming extractive: housing delivered without infrastructure, health services stretched, green space limited, and too few options for families in a market dominated by single-tenure build-to-rent. Population



**CITY BOUNDARY
VS BUILT UP AREA**
2025

change adds further pressure — with a growing older population, a large student and young professional base, and nearly half of residents identifying as Black, Asian or other ethnicity, Reading is among the most diverse and dynamic urban areas in the South East, but faces the challenge of integrating services across fragmented governance.

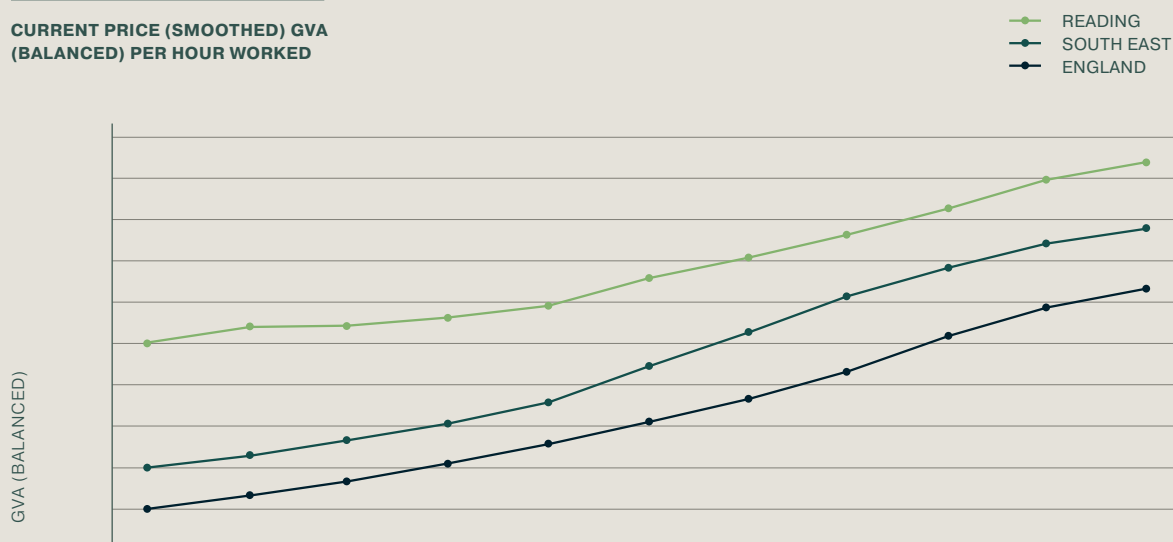
Reading has already shown what density done well can achieve: strong productivity, compact regeneration, and one of the UK's most competitive urban economies. But to sustain this, governance must match the Reading's true scale. Aligning powers across its wider functional area would enable Reading to plan housing, health, and infrastructure together — densifying with intent, building resilience into services, and supporting inclusive growth.

With the right tools, Reading can go further - not just as one of the UK's most productive economies, but as one of its most liveable: a community where density creates value for people,

“Reading has shown what can be achieved when a place has the tools to act. We’ve delivered growth, regeneration, and one of the UK’s most productive economies. But to sustain this success, and to make sure density works for people as well as businesses, we need the ability to plan at the scale our town really operates. With the right governance, Reading can be both one of the most productive and one of the most liveable urban areas in the UK.”

Jackie Yate, Chief Executive
Reading Borough Council

**CURRENT PRICE (SMOOTHED) GVA
(BALANCED) PER HOUR WORKED**



• ONS (Subregional productivity)

CASE STUDIES

Swindon

Cities in devolution

“Swindon is ready to be a driving force in the Thames Valley’s future – combining exceptional connectivity, the most affordable housing and business space in the region, and the capacity to deliver over 25,000 new homes and 10,000 jobs.

Maximising these opportunities depends on having equal partners in devolution – with this in place we could turn this potential into a powerful engine for growth, supporting the Oxford–Cambridge Arc, unlocking investment, and strengthening sustainable transport links to drive a future devolved region.”

Samantha Mowbray, Chief Executive
Swindon City Council

Local Government Reform alongside devolution is reshaping government across England. The dawning of this exciting new era for regional growth is one where each place will be governed by a unitary local authority alongside a Mayoral Strategic Authority. This shift is designed to level the playing field - building on success of established MSAs which have emerged and have shown the power of strong regional leadership, with a voice at a national level to drive inward investment and advocating unapologetically for people and businesses in place.

For devolution to succeed, it is essential that constituent local authorities are equal partners in shaping the future of their region. Getting this right means unlocking a genuinely polycentric urban network, supported by rural towns and villages where unitary authorities collaborate rather than compete - looking beyond boundaries, building on each other’s strengths, and realising their untapped potential.

Powering the Thames Valley

Joining the right regional authority has the potential to be game changing, enabling Swindon, enabling expansion of their offer to UK PLC across a connected and innovative network of empowered cities and towns working in partnership.

As a unitary council, Swindon has had access to powers across a functional geography. The town is a major hub for economic opportunity and boasts one of the highest productivity rates nationally at £48.7 GVA per hour, compared to £36.0 nationally.

Strategically located at the junction of the M4, Great Western Mainline, and A420 corridor, Swindon is a natural anchor for the Thames Valley. It connects seamlessly to Oxford, Reading and Bristol, and is only 47 minutes from London, powering supply chains from Heathrow to the western growth arc.

Swindon is home to global employers and private sector investment and is leading development of the UK’s largest speculative logistics and advanced manufacturing site: the Panattoni Park development that will deliver 7.2 million square feet of best-in-class logistics, industrial and data centre real estate.

Swindon also offers one of most affordable housing markets in the Thames Valley & Swindon sub-region – vital infrastructure to ensure the wider region both attracts and retains talent to support business growth. With the capacity to deliver 25,000 new homes and 10,000 jobs, Swindon has the potential to strengthen the wider Thames Valley housing and labour market. Easing development pressure in some of the UK’s most renowned rural landscapes.

Swindon has invested in the capabilities needed to deliver this pipeline of affordable and sustainable development, supported by public transport, green space, and low-carbon infrastructure. This makes it essential to the regions housing strategy, high-tech manufacturing and aim of accelerating net zero – ensuring growth translates into improved outcomes in health, education, and social care services for residents.



Boundary misalignment

As a unitary authority, Swindon has built delivery capability and has powers to act. What it lacks is alignment. Current boundaries fall short of the communities that depend on it - places like Wroughton, South Marston, & parts of Wiltshire and Oxfordshire rely on Swindon's infrastructure, services, and labour market.

This creates a planning and service delivery mismatch, one that places unsustainable pressure on health, education, and social care services, creating pressures that the council is expected to manage but not resourced to plan for.

Equal partners in devolution

Swindon's success is tied to the success of its neighbours. Without the right foundations in place, both local and national economies are less resilient and slower to recover from shocks.

The future of the Thames Valley and Swindon region depends on fixing the foundations that hold back other regions, so they can build on shared strengths and innovate beyond the restrictions of boundaries. Bolstered by a strong and resilient local economy, Swindon can deliver a new wave of inclusive, clean growth, powering the Thames Valley region and creating ripple effects across UK economy.

Swindon's coalition has contributed to the economic success of the city with:



**One of the highest
GVA per hour
nationally (£48.7)**



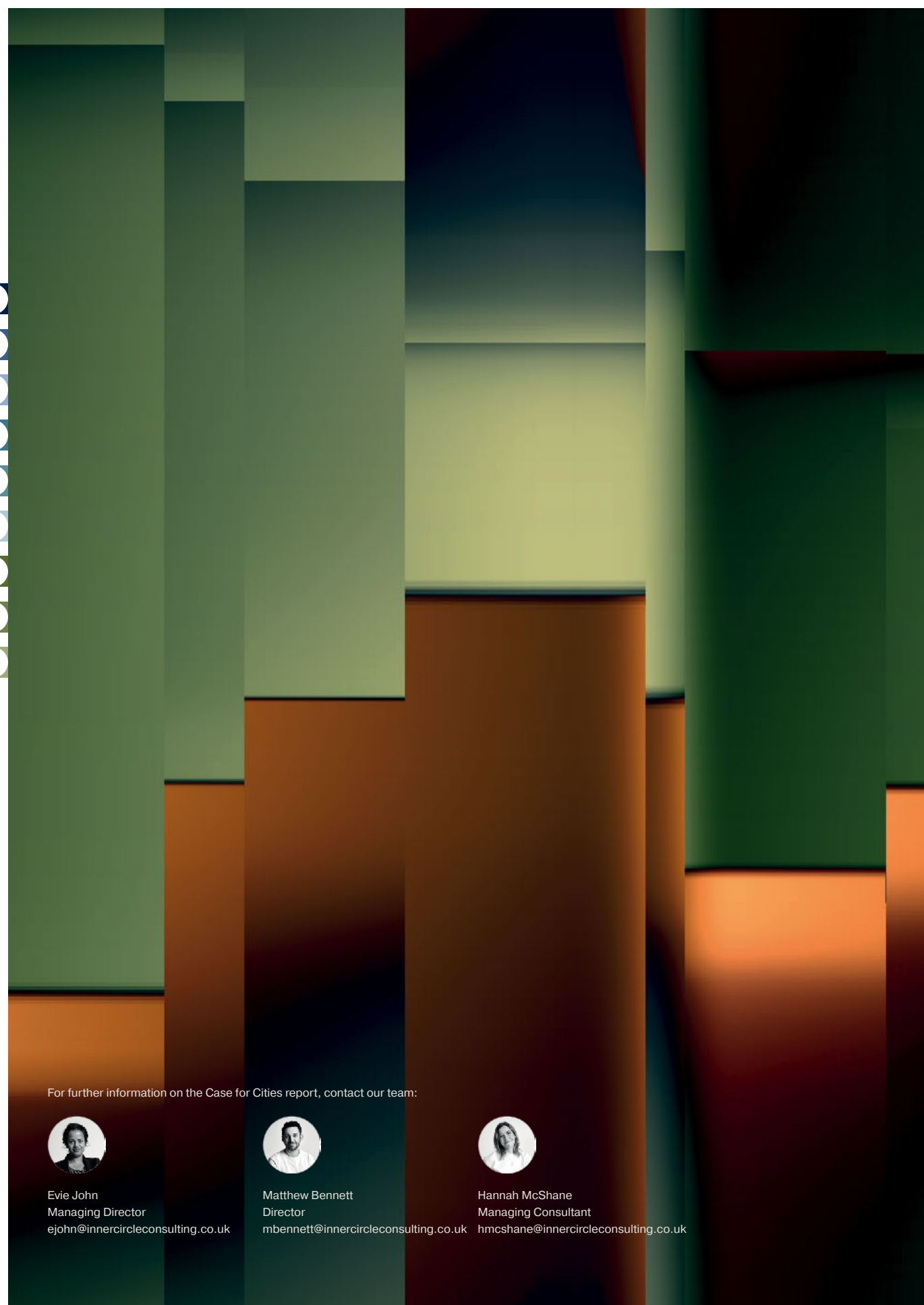
**One of the highest
employment rates
nationally (82.5%)**

The power of local place coalitions

The Devolution White Paper recognises the important role of local business boards made up of employers, committed investors, and institutions pulling in the same direction.

Swindon has this foundation already in place in its unique place coalition – a network of major businesses and institutions that anchor prosperity locally and enable cities like Swindon to drive inclusive and sustainable growth through connected networks that drive clustering and knowledge networks. The coalition includes:

- **Nationwide Building Society** – Headquartered in Swindon since 1992, Nationwide is the world's largest building society and one of the city's biggest employers, committed to mutual ownership and long term investment.
- **Thermo Fisher Scientific** – A global life sciences leader with nearly 400 staff in Swindon, driving innovation in pharmaceuticals with over \$200m recent investment in vaccine and drug manufacturing.
- **The NHS (GWR Legacy)** – Swindon's pioneering role in healthcare through the Great Western Railway Medical Fund helped shape the model for the NHS, embedding a proud tradition of innovation in public services.
- **RWE** – A global energy giant with specialist engineering operations in Swindon, supporting the energy transition and exporting expertise across Europe, Asia, and beyond.
- **Arval UK** – A leader in vehicle leasing and fleet management, headquartered in Swindon, delivering innovation in mobility and sustainable transport solutions.



For further information on the Case for Cities report, contact our team:



Evie John
Managing Director
ejohn@innercircleconsulting.co.uk



Matthew Bennett
Director
mbennett@innercircleconsulting.co.uk



Hannah McShane
Managing Consultant
hmcshane@innercircleconsulting.co.uk



Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation **Three Unitary Authorities** Proposal

www.3councils.org

Contact: lgr@oxford.gov.uk