

Apportionment of Oxford's Unmet Housing Need

June 2026

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The history of joint working between the Oxfordshire authorities to apportion and provide for Oxford's unmet housing needs is long and extensive. This background paper sets out some of this history, specifically with the aim of explaining how the apportionment of need was determined and agreed in 2016, and how it is still applicable now to the apportionment of the unmet housing need arising from the Oxford Local Plan 2045.
- 1.2 The agreed apportionment of unmet housing need arising from the Oxford Local Plan 2045 is set out in the Memorandum of Understanding of June 2026. That document is signed by all the Oxfordshire planning authorities. It sets out the 2016 apportionment that led to the housing requirements in current local plans, and explains the agreed apportionment at June 2026, and how that is being delivered in each authority, which is also expanded on in the Interim Joint Statement of Common Ground from January 2026.

2. Previous Joint Working Arrangements

Oxfordshire SHMA 2014 and Oxford SHMA roll-forward for Oxford Local Plan 2036

- 2.1 In April 2014 the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published. This was the culmination of a joint project commissioned by West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Cherwell District Council. A consultancy team of GL Hearn, Justin Gardner Consulting and SQW produced the SHMA under the oversight of the Oxfordshire Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (which became the Oxfordshire Growth Board in 2014¹).
- 2.2 The SHMA concluded that there was an identified need for provision of between 4,678-5,328 homes a year for the period 2011-2031. This was a level of housing quite different from that delivered in the past, reflecting that housing provision had not previously kept pace with what was needed. Taking a mid-point of the range of need over the period 2011-2031, the headline conclusion was a SHMA-identified housing need for Oxfordshire of 100,060 homes.
- 2.3 The SHMA was the primary evidence on housing need informing that round of Local Plans. At the time, the five different district councils were all at slightly different stages of plan preparation, resulting in different plan periods, albeit within one housing market area. Given the timing of the Oxford Local Plan and the need to make provision for housing for a period of 15 years post adoption, the City Council

¹ The Oxfordshire Growth Board became the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in 2021 and then the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee in 2025.

commissioned an addendum-style report to the 2014 SMA, rolling forward Oxford's need calculation to 2036.

Post-SHMA joint working to address unmet need from Oxford City

2.4 Following the production of the SHMA, a programme of joint work was agreed between the Oxfordshire partners, and this programme of work was agreed in November 2014 by the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

2.5 There were many strands to the post-SHMA work programme of joint work that took place through the Oxfordshire Growth Board. One workstream involved clarifying the assumed extent of Oxford's unmet need. By November 2015 a working assumption of 15,000 unmet need for homes for the period 2011-2031 was agreed, as discussed at the Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting on 19.11.2015.

2.6 There were then a number of pieces of work which helped informed the apportionment, in particular:

- LUC Green Belt Study (October 2015)
- LUC Assessment of Strategic Options (June 2016)

2.7 Alongside the LUC Assessment of Strategic Options were specialist assessments including:

- High level transport assessment of spatial options, ITP (May 2016)
- High-level assessment of education infrastructure required to support spatial options for Oxford's unmet housing need (June 2016)

2.8 These specialist studies looked at the specific impacts on transport and education of the 36 spatial options for accommodating Oxford's unmet housing need, which were generated through the joint post-SHMA work programme. The assessments included a RAG assessment of spatial options.

2.9 The Spatial Options Assessment developed and implemented a methodology for testing spatial options for meeting Oxford's unmet housing need. The 36 spatial options had been identified and agreed by the six Oxfordshire authorities (the local planning authorities and Oxfordshire County Council) as part of the post-SHMA work programme. These spatial options were identified by the local authorities as appropriate for testing/further assessment as potentially developable and well-connected to Oxford. Baseline economic, environmental, social and transport information informed the later assessment of spatial options, and helped to inform judgements about the likely effect of the options.

2.10 The assessment criteria were grouped into four categories, which were sustainability (comprising spatial relevance to Oxford, social and economic criteria and environmental criteria); landscape; Green Belt; and deliverability and viability.

- 2.11 The spatial relevance to Oxford assessed the connectivity to particular features of Oxford such as the cultural offer, educational institutions or employment nodes, although it was noted options well-connected to one feature were generally well connected to all the features. It was noted that many options would be large enough to enable enhanced or new healthcare and education provision, but there was a variation in how well connected to existing facilities different options were.
- 2.12 In terms of environmental effects, many sites were greenfield land, which in a general sense was seen as having negative effects for the environment, although with potential for positive effects in relation to provision or enhancement of green infrastructure that could be incorporated into these strategic sites. There was variation in terms of flood risk, agricultural land and proximity to nature and heritage designations, which was all assessed and reported in the Spatial Options Assessment. Green Belt and landscape impacts were also assessed.

Oxfordshire Growth Board decision on apportionment

- 2.13 The findings of the assessment of spatial options were used by the Oxfordshire Growth Board to inform the decision about apportionment of Oxford's unmet need. On 26th September 2016 a meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Committee was held to note the outcomes of the post SHMA work programme and to adopt the recommended apportionment of 14,850 homes and the timetable for delivery of Oxford's unmet housing need.
- 2.14 The recommendation followed a review of the assessment of the 36 areas of search by the Project Team. A summary of the project team's findings was appended to the committee report and this showed how the areas of search had been shortlisted, rejected, or classed as having potential for consideration but with material issues that precluded consideration at the time.

3. Continuation of the approach to apportionment for unmet need from the Oxford Local Plan 2045

- 3.1 In developing the current round of emerging Local Plans, the Oxfordshire Districts have reviewed and considered the approach to apportionment both individually in terms of developing Local Plan strategies, and collectively as part of the work programme developed to draw up the June 2016 MOU.
- 3.2 The apportionment in 2016 was based on a considerable amount of gathered information. The apportionment was based on a spatial assessment of options, considering their positive and negative impacts and deliverability. The committee report was clear that, whilst the assessment of the spatial options informed the apportionment, the short list of areas of search that underpinned the apportionment

was indicative, acknowledging that subsequent local plan work may bring other sites forward that are deemed more appropriate by the respective Local Planning Authority.

- 3.3 The timetable for delivery did not expect any delivery until 2021. The apportionment is well evidenced and sound. The strategic sites originally considered as parts of areas of search for Oxford's unmet need became embedded in what is the extant suite of plans for the Oxfordshire districts. The sites also continue to be proposed for development in emerging plans. Many sites, if not commenced, are already well progressed through the planning system.

4. Concluding Remarks

- 4.1 For these reasons, the 2016 apportionment of Oxford's unmet need amongst the neighbouring Oxfordshire authorities is considered by all the Oxfordshire authorities to be appropriate to continue, without need of or benefits to amend. The June 2026 Memorandum of Understanding shows that the neighbouring Oxfordshire districts all continue to be committed to providing for Oxford's unmet need, using this previously derived apportionment, within their own districts.