

Report to: Executive Board - Tuesday 17 June 2002

REVIEW OF THE OXFORDSHIRE STRUCTURE PLAN - ISSUES PAPER

<p>Report of: <i>Planning Policy Manager</i></p> <p>Report Author: <i>Mark Jaggard, Community Services, Tel no. 01865 252161 Email: mjaggard@oxford.gov.uk</i></p> <p>Lead Member Responsible: <i>Councillor Colin Cook</i></p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility: <i>Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee</i></p> <p>Key Decision: <i>No</i></p>	<p>WARDS AFFECTED</p> <p><i>All</i></p>
<p>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>The purpose of this report is for Members to agree the Council's response to the Issues Paper on the Review of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan.</p> <p>The Council's current input into the review of the Structure Plan will be provided from the existing staff resources in the Planning Policy team. However, there may need to be further inputs of resources at different stages of the process.</p> <p>It is important to ensure that the Structure Plan is co-ordinated with our emerging Local Plan as it will help achieve all five strategic aims in the Council's vision, i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound management; • Strengthening local communities; • Reducing poverty and inequality; • Improving the physical environment; and • Reducing our use of resources. <p>The Executive Board is ASKED to endorse the Officer comments already made on the Issues Paper.</p>	

1. The Executive Board on the 27th May considered a report on the Issues Paper for the Review of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. It was resolved that Officers should make an initial response to the Issues Paper by the deadline of 31st May 2002, and that the Executive Board would consider the response at this meeting.
2. The Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 was adopted in August 1998. It sets out the County Towns strategy that most development should take place in the towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney.
3. Oxfordshire County Council is reviewing the Oxford Structure Plan to guide how and where new development will take place up to the year 2016 (or possibly beyond). This is our opportunity to start to influence the proposals in the new Structure Plan.
4. The Issues Paper sets out the County's view on eight key issues facing Oxfordshire, and is accompanied by a questionnaire asking 23 specific questions. The Officers' response to these questions is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY THE PLANNING POLICY MANAGER AND THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT (COUNCILLOR COLIN COOK).

Appendix 1: Officers' response to the Issues Paper on the Review of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan.

Background paper: Oxfordshire - Planning our future. Review of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan - Issues Paper, April 2002, Oxfordshire County Council.

Officers' response to the Issues Paper on the Review of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan

Oxfordshire – Planning our future

Questionnaire

Issue 1 – Aims of the Structure Plan

Q1 Have we got the aims and objectives for the Structure Plan right for planning the communities and environment of Oxfordshire?

Yes No

Comments

Sustainable development is the key issue that underpins all 4 aims and objectives in the Issues Paper. This is fully supported by the City Council and is a theme incorporated throughout the first draft of the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016.

Q2 Should any of the aims be given higher priority than others? (Tick all that apply) **No, see comments below.**

• Aim 1	Protecting and enhancing the environment and character of Oxfordshire	✓
• Aim 2	Encouraging the efficient use of land and natural resources.	✓
• Aim 3	Improving the quality of life of Oxfordshire's residents.	✓
• Aim 4	Promoting economic prosperity.	✓

Why do you think that? (If you have ticked more than one box, please state order of priority)

Comments

All the aims are important but a balance needs to be struck between environmental and economic objectives in order to achieve benefits that will service the wider community.

The City Council supports making best use of previously developed land for a range of land uses (especially mixed-use developments) and raising densities. This can help protect the environment and provide the homes, jobs and facilities people require.

Issue 2 – Economic development and prosperity

- Q3** What should our priorities be in the Structure Plan for maintaining and developing a prosperous and competitive economy?

Comments

Oxford has a central role to play in the economy of Oxfordshire which should be recognised by the Structure Plan. The vitality, diversity and responsiveness of Oxford's economy are fundamental concerns for the future development of Oxford. Oxford needs to build on its economic strengths such as education, healthcare, research and development, tourism and manufacturing. This will ensure key sectors remain competitive and continue to flourish. The overall approach will be to encourage better use of existing resources and provide diversity in employment opportunities. There are still parts of the City with high unemployment levels and there is a need to increase access to employment opportunities and improve skill levels.

- Q4** Does the approach to economic development in the current Structure Plan create the right balance between providing for firms who need to be in Oxfordshire and protecting the environment and quality of life?

Comments

The current Structure Plan policy E1 which encourages the redevelopment of employment land for residential use, should be deleted. The policy is too blunt and instead, a cascading approach to employment sites should be followed, as set out in the first draft Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, or additional criteria should be added to ensure important employment sites are not lost (i.e. where the loss would reduce employment diversity). Policy E1 has resulted in the loss of important small employment sites/businesses and reduced local employment diversity. It has also increased the need to travel and is likely to be part of the cause of out commuting from Oxford. This has been counter-productive in terms of the County's principal concern of sustainability. Employment in the City is more accessible by all

modes of transport than anywhere else in the County.

There is sufficient employment land identified in Oxford to cater for large employers (e.g. Oxford Science Park, Littlemore, Unipart, Cowley and Oxford Business Park).

There perhaps needs to be wider debate about the level of economic development in the County especially in regard to the Cambridge - Milton Keynes - Oxford arc, and the M3 / M40 wedge. Is Oxfordshire content to continue with a policy of employment restraint or should it re-examine its wider role within the South East region?

- Q5** Are there any particular parts of Oxfordshire where we should encourage future job growth, for example in particular districts, towns or villages?

Comments

Yes, limited sustainable growth for the two universities, hospital trusts, shopping and arts/cultural facilities are planned for Oxford. Other growth should largely be limited to urban areas outside Oxford where jobs are realistically accessible by walking, cycling and public transport for the majority of people travelling to the site (also see questions 3 & 4 above).

Q6 & Q7 – not relevant to Oxford City

Issue 3 – The Environment and natural resources

- Q8** Are we doing enough in the Structure Plan to protect the environment of Oxfordshire?

Comments

Yes, the Structure Plan provides good protection for the County's environment whilst Oxford City's Local Plan provides strong, detailed, local protection. The Countryside Agency's report on Landscape Character Assessment should help to inform the Structure Plan's environmental protection designations around and within Oxford City. This report has been used to inform the first draft Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016. However a balance needs to be struck between economic, social and environmental considerations against the wider needs of the people in the County, especially groups who are socially excluded or not well represented.

Flooding is a major concern of local people so the Structure Plan's advice should be strengthened in light of PPG25.

There are no mineral extraction sites in Oxford City so this is more a matter for neighbouring districts.

- Q9** How should the structure Plan encourage efficient use of natural resources and energy in new development?

Comments

The issue of natural resources should be given a much higher profile in the emerging Structure Plan. The aim should be to reduce, reclaim and re-use natural materials. Energy conservation and renewable energy are central to the principals of sustainable development and should be highlighted. Many of these gains can be achieved through good design in terms of layout, design, orientation, materials and landscaping of buildings.

The first draft Oxford Local Plan 2001 - 2016 seeks to ensure the efficient use of natural resources by new developments fully encompassing the principals of energy efficiency, provision of renewable energy, provision for recycling, and the use of recycled materials. Developers of major developments will be required to submit a Natural Resource Impact Analysis (NRIA) to demonstrate how their developments include all of these principals. The Structure Plan should reflect this requirement at the strategic level.

- Q10 – not relevant to Oxford City**

Issue 4 – The amount and type of housing development

Q11 What are your views about the total number of houses to be built in Oxfordshire up to 2016?

Comments

Oxfordshire's share of the regional housing requirement up to 2016 is another 12,650 dwellings in addition to the 35,500 provided for in the adopted Structure Plan. Oxford's share of the 35,500 for the period 1996-2011 is 3,750 but this figure has already been met by dwellings completed and planning permissions granted or subject to legal agreements.

The City Council does not object to the amount/rate of dwellings (2,430 per year from 2001 – 2006) as set out in RPG9. However the rate of residential development is likely to fall significantly short of demand and this will add to the County and City's housing problems, which have an impact on the local economy and further increase long distance commuting. There should not be an under provision of dwellings (i.e. development rate should not fall below the RPG rate of 2,430 per annum up to 2006).

The outcome of the County wide Urban Capacity Study will be important in determining the distribution of residential development which will need to be carefully scrutinised. A large residential allocation within Oxford City's boundary may result in environmental damage and be at the cost of other important land uses that also need to be accommodated within Oxford.

Q12 What types of dwelling (e.g. small, large, houses, flats etc.), do you think should be built in Oxfordshire in the future?

Comments

For affordable dwellings, types and sizes will be guided by housing need studies. The County should compile this information and incorporate the results into the Structure Plan.

It may be more difficult to specify types and sizes of dwellings for the private sector. However the County will no doubt be guided by population forecasts, general housing surveys, review past residential permissions and consider the views from the building industry. Again the results of this investigation should be incorporated into the Structure Plan to provide better guidance for developers. The County should note the Supplementary Planning Guidance produced by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council on this issue, and use it as a good practice guide.

Consideration should be given to changing living, working and shopping lifestyles over the Plan period. The need for live-work units should be considered.

The aim should be to meet the residential requirements of the whole community now and in the future. New developments should improve the existing mix of dwellings and cater for a wide range of people and their lifestyles.

Issue 5 – Meeting needs for affordable housing

Q13 What should be the role of the Structure Plan in helping to meet the needs for affordable housing?

Comments

Affordable housing is a key issue for the Structure Plan and Oxford's Local Plan. Oxford City members place a very high priority on increasing the supply of affordable dwellings within and in areas near to Oxford.

The Structure Plan should provide much stronger strategic guidance and support on the level of affordable dwellings needed across the County. There should be a general presumption in favour of on-site provision that should be fully integrated into proposed developments. It should be made clear that a lack of affordable dwellings, where required, would justify the refusal of planning permission.

Oxford's housing market is becoming polarised at the high and 'low' ends (although not nearly enough at the lower end of the market) which is squeezing out the entire middle section of the population. This is having a negative impact on the City's economy, as employers are finding it hard to recruit staff. This means a wide range of people falling into the 'housing need' category. These people perform important services in Oxford, which range from nurses and teachers to shop assistants, cleaners, administrative staff, and even many local government workers. I have attached as Appendix 1 an extract from the first deposit Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 that defines the different types of affordable housing. Further work is being done on housing needs, and in particular, to identify the wide range of key workers. This is clearly not just an issue for Oxford but must be addressed in the other districts in order to create a more strategic approach to addressing the issue of affordable and key worker dwellings.

The Structure Plan should set minimum County thresholds and minimum percentages for affordable dwellings. The County Council will note that the first draft Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 generally seeks a minimum of 50% affordable dwellings and in addition another 20% for key workers dwellings. The threshold is two dwellings.

The issue of affordable dwellings will need to be reviewed by the County and District Councils if the Government introduce tariffs.

Issue 6 – Travel in Oxfordshire

Q14 Do you agree or disagree with the County Council's approach to transport issues in the Structure Plan?

Comments

The main thrust of the County's approach is to locate development where it would reduce the need to travel and promote greater use of walking, cycling and public transport. This is supported by the City Council.

The travel to work area needs to be up-dated. Further work needs to be done to identify travel patterns of people in the County.

Despite some employment growth in the Country Towns taking place in parallel with Oxford, this has produced more travel into Oxford, not less. The dependence upon jobs in Oxford has continued and will do so in future. There is clearly a large amount of in commuting into Oxford. This is a serious issue which must be addressed in the Structure Plan. West Oxfordshire District Council's research in 1996 found that 38% of the residents of West Witney (Deer Park) in full time employment worked in Central Oxfordshire, with less than 30% working in Witney or inside a 10 mile radius within the District.

Oxford Brookes University' School of Planning carried out research into the transport effects of five comparable recent housing developments in Botley, Kidlington, Bicester, Didcot and Witney. The County Town developments were distinguished by the higher distances travelled in regular journeys (the highest being 182 miles per adult per week in Bicester, compared with the lowest 65% in Kidlington). These differences are largely a reflection of the degree of self-containment. In the Botley development, 63% of work trips were within the Oxford built-up area. For Kidlington, the figure was 70% (including Oxford). However the equivalent figures for Bicester, Didcot and Witney were 18%, 16% and 21% respectively. There are not only significant flows of work trips to Oxford, but also even larger flows to the rest of the County and, indeed, outside the County, especially from Bicester and Didcot.

What this points to is developing a Central Oxfordshire strategy as a location for future development. The key to the strategy's success will be to improve the transport infrastructure in Oxford, to the proposed extensions around Oxford and between the County Towns and Oxford. Transport investment in existing and potential public transport corridors should be given top priority. The review of the Structure Plan should be linked to a review/updating of the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan.

The City County supports the relocation of Oxford Railway Station and would like this to be acknowledged in the Structure

Plan in terms of improving rail services to Oxford. Besides the existing Park & Ride sites in Oxford City, the County should investigate providing additional facilities in the County Towns along with bus lanes into Oxford.

GTE is important to Oxford City but it is subject to further investigations, especially in terms of the precise route alignment. It is important to note that GTE should serve areas within Oxford City as well as the City centre.

Oxford Brookes University and the City Council's Planning Policy section are carrying out a survey of new residential developments within Oxford to clarify housing preferences and travel patterns. The results should aid the City and County Councils.

Issue 7 – Where should new development be located?

- Q15** How should the Structure Plan protect the character of towns and retain land for uses such as recreation and employment, while trying to maximise the development of sites for new housing?

Comments

Oxford's character will potentially be damaged and its infrastructure over loaded if too much residential development is allocated within Oxford City's boundary. It is almost impossible to phase development in a complex urban environment like Oxford. While Oxford has a large number of previously developed sites, not all of them are suitable for residential development due to the need to accommodate other important land uses.

However, Oxford will continue to accommodate extra growth at a sustainable rate, as set out in the first draft Oxford Local Plan-2001 – 2016, which will help preserve its character. It is important to ensure that important green spaces in Oxford are preserved for future generations.

Extra growth can be best accommodated by urban extensions to Oxford (see Q16) and development of land near to Oxford (see Q19). New development within these areas needs to be a mixture of land uses that will deliver local service, shops, jobs and education along with a significant amount of additional affordable dwellings.

Q16 Which towns in Oxfordshire do you think would benefit from new housing development in the form of urban extensions – and why?

Comments

The City Council supports a PPG3 type urban extensions to Oxford which would involve some low grade Green Belt land but would not impact on the setting of the City. Further residential development around Oxford would be sustainable for several reasons:

- **there is a concentration of key employers in Oxford,**
- **there is a good public transport network which is capable of being expanded to serve additional development near to Oxford, and**
- **there is the ability to improve the capacity of local facilities and services for local people. For example, key workers, such as nurses, need to be located on good public transport routes and/or near to the hospitals due to shift work.**

The size of the urban extension needs careful consideration so that it is large enough to provide a district centre and the appropriate range of infrastructure, including a primary school etc. but small enough that it functions as an urban extension rather than a new settlement.

Q17 Do you think developing a new free-standing or expanded settlement would be preferable to further major extensions of our urban areas?

Comments

No, it would not be correct to put forward a 'new town' over urban expansions in terms of the sequential approach set out in PPG3.

Q18 Do you think major development at Upper Heyford should be considered?

Comments

The successful redevelopment of the previously developed land at Upper Heyford will depend on its ability to create a community with a full range of facilities and the development of a good public transport system. If the site is developed the most efficient use of the land should be made, with an average net residential density of 50 dwellings per hectare. The development of Upper Hayford needs to be assessed against paragraphs 31 and 32 of PPG3.

However, it would be easier and preferable to extend Oxford and surrounding area (see Q19) and expand its existing infrastructure rather than essentially start from scratch at Upper Heyford.

Depending on the level of new housing required during the Plan period, and the capacity for residential development on previously developed land through out the County, it may be appropriate to develop both sites.

Q19 Overall, which option or combination of options for locating new development in Oxfordshire do you think is the most appropriate? (Please tick your preferred option or combination of options).

- Extensions to urban areas – Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney
- Extensions to urban areas – Oxford and Abingdon
- Extensions to urban areas – smaller towns
- New or expanded towns

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Comments

Extension(s) to Oxford is the best option for new development. There is also potential to accommodate further residential development in a western strip of land around Oxford. This would require a new public transport corridor (rail, bus and GTE) being developed between this area and Oxford. Additional development could also be accommodated at Oxford Airport and Dalton Barracks but this would require the development of an efficient public transport system to connect these areas to Abingdon and Oxford.

Issue 8 – The time period of the Structure Plan

Q20 Do you think the Structure Plan should look further ahead than to the year 2016?

Comments

Yes, alterations can be made to the housing figures on a more frequent basis but a longer strategic vision for the County would be welcomed to say 2021 or beyond. This would help plan infrastructure in a more comprehensive manner as many projects take years to plan and deliver. It may also allow transport infrastructure to be put in place that will serve new development.

Other issues

Q21 Are there any other issues which you think the Structure Plan should take into account?

Comments

The City Council would like to see a better and more transparent link between proposed land uses and transport.

The Structure Plan recognises Oxford City centre as a sub regional shopping area therefore there will be a need for some expansion of shopping, tourism and associated employment in the City centre. There is also a desire to promote a wider range of shops in the City and District centres that will better serve both local and visitor needs.

Q22 Are you satisfied with the way the County Council intends to involve people in the Structure Plan review?

Comments

The County's public consultation exercise on 26 April 2002 was well run by Land Use Consultants. It was useful in terms of hearing people's views on core issues such as affordable housing and the preferred location of new development. Understandably the County has limited staff resources and must focus on selected core groups. However, some additional thought should be given to the inclusion of under represented groups. This may include young people (e.g. perhaps prepare a pack for schools so they can participate in the Structure Plan process), diverse ethnic and religious groups, women and children, people in housing need, key workers, etc.

Q23 Is there anything else you would like to raise about the Structure Plan or the consultation process for reviewing the Structure Plan?

Comments

Thank the County Council for consulting on key issues that will be considered in the Structure Plan review. The City Council hopes the County will consider and assess the capacity of Central Oxfordshire (including land in the Green Belt) to accommodate a significant proportion of the future development needs of the County along with the extension and development of new public transport corridors.

Your details

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If you would like to be kept informed about the Structure Plan review, please tick this box.

Thanks you for completing this questionnaire.

Extract from the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2001 –2016

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Not only must the planning system make provision for housing *per se* within each authority's area, but it must also ensure that the dwellings which are provided will meet the residential needs of local people. This is done through establishing what that need is in terms of the type of dwelling, the affordability of dwellings, and the tenure of dwellings. The City Council has commissioned a housing needs assessment study in line with Government guidance to establish this need. It will, in addition, monitor that need to ensure that it is being addressed.

7.1.2 In Oxford, where house prices are extremely high, the ability of people to find suitable accommodation for their needs does not only affect the poorest people, but also many others on modest incomes. In fact, people who earn the national average wage in Oxford are unable to afford even the most basic accommodation.

7.1.3 The City Council will ensure that the housing needs of the people of Oxford are addressed through the planning system. It will not allow developments that do not address that need. Section 14.0, Development Sites and Appendix 9, highlight a number of residential and mixed-use sites which include an element of residential use. These sites should be read together with the Affordable Housing and Key Worker Housing policies.

7.1.4 This Section of the Plan makes reference to various terms: these are defined below.

Definitions

Definition of Market Housing

Market Housing is defined as housing available to the general public, or to specialist sectors of the housing market (including students, special needs, or elderly people) either for sale or for rent or a combination of sale and rent where the price payable is substantially equivalent to the prevailing price for that product as may be agreed between the owner and the occupant.

Definition of Key Worker Housing

A dwelling is defined as Key Worker Housing where it is dedicated through an appropriate legal agreement as Key Worker Housing and made available as such by a Registered Social Landlord. It should be of suitable size for a household where at least one member of that household is an employee of an organisation who has entered into a Key Worker Agreement with an RSL and the City Council, and is eligible for Key Worker Housing under that agreement. Key Worker Housing is aimed at households whose income is moderate but below the local average wage. (For Oxfordshire, based on April 2001 data, the average wage for males is £26,000 and for females is £18,974.) For schemes seeking Key Worker Housing aimed at nurses, teachers, or other professions predominately undertaken by women, the female average wage should be used. For other professions, a combined female and male average wage should be used.

The term 'Key Worker Housing' is tenure neutral. Its precise form will depend on the agreements reached between the City Council, the RSL, and the Employer. However, because of the need to ensure that benefit of the housing is enjoyed by the occupant by virtue of his or her employment, it is likely that outright ownership will not be a suitable form of tenure.

Definition of Affordable Housing

A dwelling is defined as affordable where:

- it has the smallest number of rooms appropriate to address the housing needs of a household in unsuitable accommodation and*
- the price for that dwelling (expressed as a periodic cost) is less than 30% of the gross household income.*

This price should equate to a periodic outgoing for the household on rent, lease or mortgage equivalent to that for similar accommodation provided by Registered Social Landlords in Oxford for accommodation of similar size and quality (as listed in the Housing Strategy).

The term 'Affordable Dwelling' is tenure neutral; it can refer to dwellings for rent, for shared ownership, or for outright purchase. However, in order to be affordable it must comply with the above definition. Affordable Housing secured through the planning system should be made available to those in housing need on a permanent basis. For the purposes of this Plan, Affordable Housing excludes Key Worker Housing.

Definition of Low-cost Market Housing

The term 'Low-cost Market Housing' as stated in Circular 6/98 is not precisely defined and can be misinterpreted. For the purposes of this Plan, this term is defined as follows:

Housing which is available for outright purchase by the occupant at a price expressed in terms of the local average wage.

- The dwelling may only be occupied by the purchaser and their household.*
- The discount must be available in perpetuity.*

The price must be affordable to people in housing need and agreed with the City Council in line with the City Council's published Housing Strategy.