

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this document

In March 2007 Oxford City Council published [Oxford 2026: Core Strategy Preferred Options](#) to seek your views on how Oxford should plan for, and manage growth and development over a 20-year period up to 2026. We had a good response to this consultation, which gave us a lot of information to help take those options forward, so thank you.

Since that document was produced, the examination of the South East Plan – the regional spatial strategy for the South East – has concluded, and as a result we need to consult on some further options. We have also identified the need for a new Core Strategy policy on culture and community. This further consultation **seeks your views on the further preferred options and approaches** we are considering as a result of these developments.

This document has the same status as the previous Preferred Options document (March 2007), but also covers issues raised since then. You may submit comments on the preferred options in this document over a six-week period from 7<sup>th</sup> March until 18<sup>th</sup> April 2008. We will take them into account in preparing the formal Core Strategy that we will be submit to the Secretary of State in October 2008.

Please remember that **all comments previously submitted to us remain equally valid**, and that further comments should focus only on the changes outlined in this document.

This document is divided into the following sections:

<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> This section sets out implications for the Oxford Core Strategy arising from recommended changes to the South East Plan.
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Spatial strategy and key diagram</b> This sets out a revised spatial strategy for Oxford, and includes a revised key diagram.
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>South Oxford Strategic Development Area</b> This sets out changes to the original preferred options, resulting from the Panel's recommendation for a South Oxford SDA.
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>Cultural and community development</b> This sets out new preferred and alternative options on cultural and community development.
<b>Section 5</b>	<b>How to respond to this document</b>

## 1.2 South East Plan Panel Report

In August 2007, the Panel of Inspectors that independently examined the draft South East Plan published their report (the Panel Report). The report recommends some new elements to the South East Plan, which would significantly affect Oxford.

The Panel Report is being considered by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who is expected to publish her response during the first half of 2008. In anticipation of the Government's response, the

City Council needs to consider the implications of the Panel Report for the Core Strategy, and consult you on these. This is important in making sure the Core Strategy conforms with the South East Plan when that Plan is adopted.

In brief, the key changes recommended by the Panel that particularly affect Oxford are:

- a) a Strategic Development Area (SDA) on the southern edge of Oxford (Grenoble Road) – the **South Oxford SDA** – to allow an **urban extension** of at least 4,000 dwellings just beyond Oxford's boundary;
- b) increased support for **economic growth** in the Central Oxfordshire sub-region;
- c) a **higher level of housing** for Oxford.

a) South Oxford Strategic Development Area

The Panel said that an urban extension to Oxford would be required to meet local housing needs in the longer term. They recommend an urban extension of at least 4,000 dwellings, as part of a South Oxford SDA. They recognise that this would require a review of the Green Belt boundaries, but have not come to this decision lightly as they are fully aware of the value that local residents place on each part of the Green Belt and of the function it fulfils.

The Panel said exceptional circumstances to justified a Green Belt review, including:

- excessive differences between people's incomes and house prices, some of the highest house prices in the region, and a backlog of housing need;
- more jobs currently available than people to fill them, and staff recruitment and retention problems;
- significant potential within nationally important employment sectors; and
- worsening traffic congestion.

The Panel considered that there are limits to the amount of development that could be accommodated within Oxford's urban fabric, without damaging the special character of the City and putting pressure on its green spaces. They further highlighted the increase in car travel that would result from concentrating development on the outer edge of the Green Belt in the surrounding towns.

To accommodate an urban extension south of Oxford, the Panel recommended a highly focused, selective Green Belt review just south of Oxford. The land likely to form a southern urban extension lies within South Oxfordshire District, so the Panel recommended that the two authorities (South Oxfordshire District Council and the City Council) produce a joint planning document to take forward a South Oxford SDA, ensuring its integration with Oxford's urban fabric.

Although the detailed planning of the South Oxford SDA is a matter for a later development plan document, it is important that the Core Strategy addresses this issue at a strategic (overall planning) level. The urban extension, if confirmed in the adopted version of the South East Plan, would play an important part in the spatial strategy for Oxford.

b) Economic growth

The Panel Report recommends allowing a higher level of economic development for Oxford than specified in the draft South East Plan. The Panel Report recognises that some new employment land could be needed within Oxford to avoid undue constraint on the City's economic potential, but that the exact requirements should be determined through local planning documents, such as the Core Strategy. The Report acknowledges that safeguarded land at Peartree is large enough to meet the lower end of the estimated need for additional employment land in Oxford.

In the Preferred Options document on the Core Strategy you were consulted on a range of options from minimal growth (1,000 new jobs) to a higher level of growth (12,500 new jobs over the period to 2026). A 'managed' level

of employment growth (up to around 4,500 jobs) would require another strategic employment site of about 17.5 hectares; this approach is consistent with the Panel Report.

c) Housing growth

The Panel Report recommends allocating an extra 1,000 dwellings in Oxford, which gives an overall target of at least 8,000 new dwellings over the South East Plan period (to 2026). This increase equates to 400 new dwellings a year, and reflects that Oxford has been awarded New Growth Point<sup>1</sup> status. You were consulted on a range of options for housing growth in the Preferred Options document, ranging from 350 to over 550 dwellings per year.

The majority of responses to the previous Preferred Options document<sup>2</sup> supported one of the lower housing growth options, from 350 to 433 dwellings per year (7,000–8,660 new dwellings over the next 20 years). However, the lower end of this range is no longer a realistic option, as it is below that set out in the Panel Report.

### 1.3 Revised spatial strategy and strategic sites update

We have revised the spatial strategy and the key diagram in the original Preferred Options document to reflect the Panel's recommendations affecting Oxford, and to update the position on the strategic locations for development as work has progressed on the Core Strategy.

We originally consulted on five potential strategic sites for development, and on strategic growth planned in the West End area of the City centre. The current position on each of these is set out below. For clarity, on each of the strategic sites development would not take place on areas of floodplain, or on allotments, or on actively-used playing fields.

We are likely to continue to propose *Pear Tree/Northern Gateway* for modern mixed-use employment in the Core Strategy (as set out in the Preferred Option published in March 2007).

*Land at Barton* is likely to be proposed for residential development, plus a range of complementary mixed uses (as set out in Option 2 published in March 2007). This option received the most support of the five options previously consulted upon.

*Land at Summertown* is likely to be proposed as a contingency site for residential development. This would mean the site being released *only if* we found in future that housing development elsewhere in Oxford couldn't meet adopted housing targets (the original Preferred Option was for residential development).

*Southfield Golf Course East* and *West* are not likely to be taken forward as development sites in this Core Strategy. This decision reflects significant ecological and hydrological constraints identified through independent studies. If future detailed work on these sites can identify robust ways of reducing the potential difficulties, we may reassess them in next reviewing the Core Strategy.

*Oxford's West End* is to undergo a major renaissance, and will contribute significantly to housing growth in the City, as well as providing new cultural and employment uses (as set out in the City centre Preferred Approach in March 2007). The West End Area Action Plan (WEAAP) is due to be adopted later this year.

As the approaches proposed for the strategic sites were all included as options in the original Preferred Options document, we are not inviting further comments specifically on these sites. However, you may wish to comment on the revised spatial strategy and key diagram in Section 2.

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<sup>1</sup> New Growth Point: The Government is entering into a long-term partnership with Oxford City Council, recognising the City's potential for growth. (See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/growthareas/newgrowthpoints/> for more information.)

<sup>2</sup> Oxford 2026 Core Strategy: Preferred Options Document – Public Consultation Report (October 2007)

## 1.4 New preferred options

When we consulted on the previous preferred options, some of you told us that we should have included options on cultural development. The Core Strategy also needs to consider the issue of community development. We would therefore like your views on our preferred and alternative options for developing Core Strategy policies on these related issues.

## 1.5 Revised timetable

We are planning to consult you on the draft policies in June, before formally submitting the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State in October. These extra consultations, and the need to complete our evidence gathering, mean that the submission of our final Core Strategy will be delayed by a few months. The revised timetable is as follows:

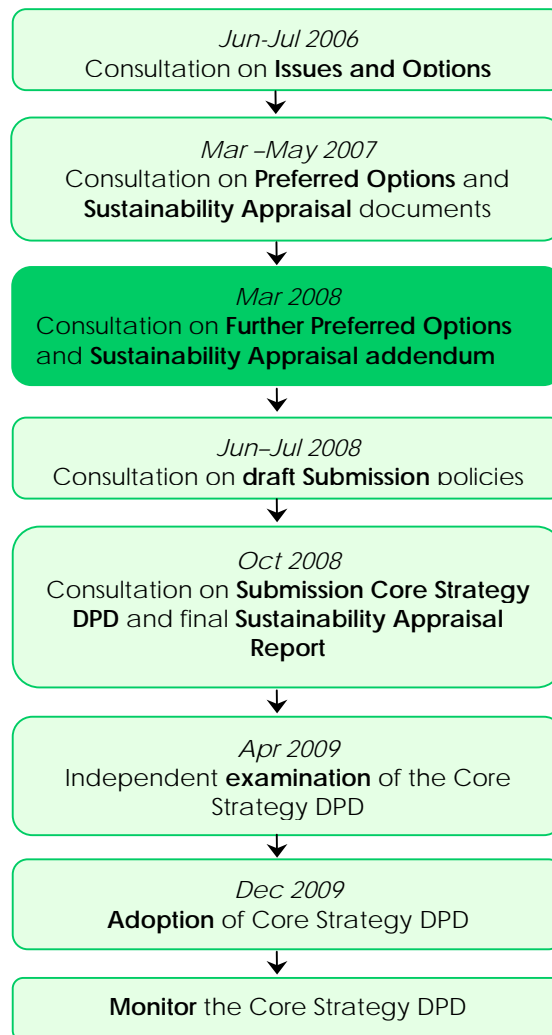


Figure 1: Core Strategy revised timetable

## 2. Revised spatial strategy

### Oxford's role in the region

Oxford should continue to grow and develop as the focus of the Central Oxfordshire sub-region, and as a Regional Hub in the South East. The interaction between the universities, teaching hospitals and research and spin-out companies makes a distinctive and essential contribution to the regional and national economy. At the same time, Oxford is the main service, cultural and administrative centre for Oxfordshire.

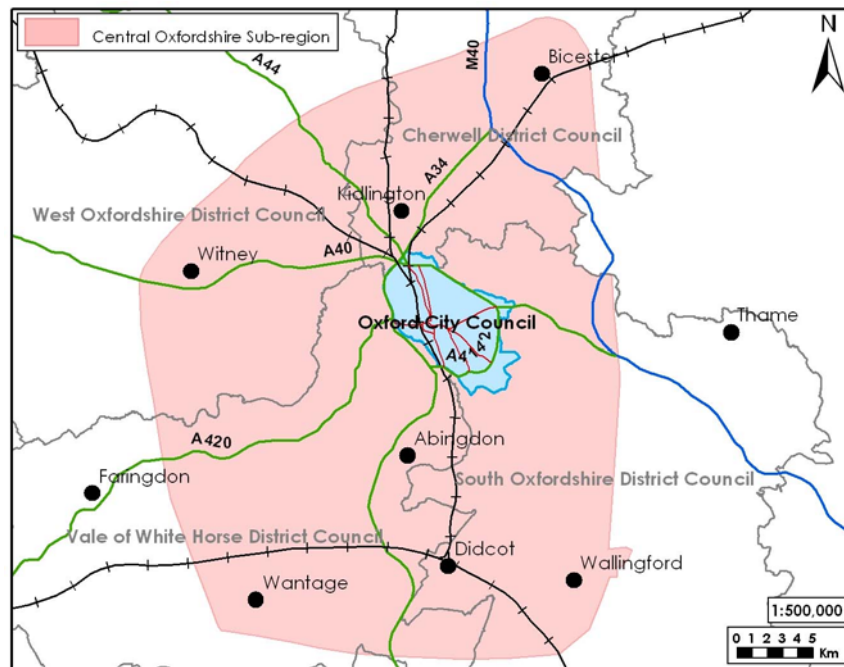


Figure 2: Central Oxfordshire sub-region

The potential of Oxford and its sub-region to act as a catalyst for growth and investment has been recognised in various ways. Oxford is part of a grouping of nine 'core' cities and towns in the South East Region, and with the Central Oxfordshire Sub-Region, is identified as one of the nine 'Diamonds for Growth' in the Regional Economic Strategy. The Government has named Oxford as one of 29 'New Growth Points' across the UK because of the City's potential for growth and its record of housing delivery. The County Council has secured a provisional funding allocation of over £60m from the South East Regional Transport Board to improve strategic road and rail access to Oxford in 2013-2015. All these factors show that Oxford is equipped to play its role in the region's economic future.

Oxford is an inherently sustainable location for housing, as indicated by some of the statistics in the spatial portrait. It is in a good position to assimilate growth because of its well-established bus and cycle networks, and its social infrastructure made up of extensive retail, health, leisure, cultural and community provision. The South East Plan Panel Report concluded that a Strategic Development Area immediately south of Oxford would be a comparatively sustainable means of accommodating development needs in the Central Oxfordshire sub-region.

### Meeting development needs

The City Council's strategy is to meet development needs as far as possible by making efficient use of previously developed ('brownfield') land. Using existing brownfield land in this way helps to protect valuable open space within and around Oxford.

In terms of housing, it will never be possible to meet demand, or even proven need, within Oxford given the scarcity of land and environmental constraints. Since average densities in Oxford are already among the highest in the South East, and there are serious concerns about the number of family homes being converted into flats,

we consider that scope is limited for further increases in densities outside the City centre. Priority will be given to more affordable housing and to delivering a broader mix of housing type, size and tenures to promote balanced and stable communities.

Most new housing will continue to be built on brownfield land, including a significant amount in the West End. However, in view of the level of housing need and because less brownfield land is likely to be available for redevelopment over the next 20 years, some residential development will need to be brought forward on greenfield sites.

Although Oxford's economy has many strengths, the Employment Land Study shows that there is a danger of complacency about the City's economic health. To ensure continuing economic success, key sectors of the economy need to be nurtured and developed through a policy of managed growth, which protects existing employment sites and allows for a moderate increase in employment floorspace.

Some employment development will take place in the West End, and through the modernisation and redevelopment of existing previously developed land. However, at least one sizeable area of greenfield land will need to be brought forward to meet the employment needs identified during the Core Strategy period. The Northern Gateway/Peartree is considered the most suitable site for a mixed-use, employment-led development, and offers the opportunity to create a landmark 'gateway' to Oxford. The proposed increase in employment will be more than offset by extra housing, including the urban extension recommended by the South East Plan Panel, so as not to exacerbate in-commuting.

### Climate change and Oxford's environment

Climate change is an urgent and pressing issue at all levels (global, national, regional and local). This is directly relevant to Oxford, given that large areas of the City are vulnerable to flooding. The City Council is committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 3% year on year, and hopes that other organisations and businesses in Oxford will adopt the same aim.

The planning system has a particularly important role in tackling climate change, both in minimising the impact of human activities on greenhouse gas emissions and in preparing for the potential adverse effects of climate change (for example the increased probability of extreme weather events such as floods). We are already leading the way in terms of minimising the use of natural resources in new developments through our adopted Natural Resource Impact Analysis SPD. The Core Strategy takes this forward, by promoting low- and zero-carbon developments, and by making the twin challenges of mitigating and adapting to climate change central to the spatial strategy.

While we wish to promote managed growth and development in Oxford, the exceptional quality of Oxford's built and natural environment will continue to be protected and enhanced. This includes its intrinsic environmental assets, such as the irreplaceable historic core, and the extensive green wedges that penetrate into the heart of the City from the surrounding countryside. Protection of the flood plain along the river corridors will retain the distinctive physical form of the City, as well as helping to reduce the risk of flooding and providing a valuable recreational and ecological resource. The Core Strategy therefore avoids any development that would affect these essential elements of Oxford's special character.

### Hierarchy of centres

The City centre will continue to be the main focus for developments that attract a large number of people, as it serves a wide catchment area, and its role as a Primary Regional Centre will be enhanced through the renaissance of the West End quarter. Some key transport infrastructure improvements will be focused on the West End to support the spatial strategy.

The role of District centres will be supported, and they will be expected to take a greater share of future retail development during the Core Strategy period, given that scope in the City centre will be limited after the Westgate and St Aldates and Queen Street schemes are implemented. District centres will also be appropriate

locations for other uses such as employment and leisure. The District centres are well connected to radial bus routes into the City centre, but priority will be given to improving the network of cross-City public transport links, and to improving cycle and pedestrian access to these centres.

The spatial strategy recognises that Cowley centre draws shoppers from a larger catchment than the other District centres, and seeks to fulfil its potential for further growth by redesignating it as a Primary District Centre. An urban extension to the south of Oxford, integrated with the existing urban fabric, would reinforce the important role of Cowley centre as a retail and service centre for the south-eastern quadrant of the City.

### Regeneration and sustainable communities

The spatial portrait highlights some pockets of significant deprivation in Oxford. Development in these areas can bring about positive change in several ways, for instance by improving the mix of housing; providing new community facilities and employment opportunities; enhancing the environment; and improving accessibility. A key element of the spatial strategy is to harness growth and development to help regenerate deprived areas.

Development of the strategic site at Barton will be used as a catalyst for regeneration of the adjoining area, while development in the West End will transform this under-used part of the City centre into a vibrant urban quarter. The proposed South Oxford Strategic Development Area would adjoin some of the least prosperous areas of Oxford, and we will seek to ensure, through partnership working, that this development is well integrated physically and functionally with the existing urban fabric, and also benefits existing communities.

The City Council wishes to promote vibrant, sustainable communities throughout Oxford. The Core Strategy sets a framework for many of the factors that can help communities to be sustainable, including delivering affordable housing, providing accessible local services, protecting and enhancing green spaces, promoting community safety, and high-quality urban design.

In working towards sustainable communities, we recognise that different communities each have particular characteristics and issues to address. Even in a fairly compact city like Oxford, many residents will seek to meet their everyday needs in their own communities. Fifteen neighbourhood areas have been identified in Oxford. While some of these may be quite small in geographical and population terms, each has its own distinctive character. We will develop the neighbourhood areas concept as a spatial planning tool in the Oxford Local Development Framework (LDF). This will help to refine the application of planning policies to suit local circumstances, and to distribute locally accessible community facilities and open space fairly across the City.

### The spatial strategy

*The spatial strategy for Oxford, as shown on the key diagram, is to:*

- *reduce the need to travel by applying a sequential approach to developments that attract a large number of people, starting with Oxford City centre; then the Cowley Centre Primary District centre; then the District centres of Blackbird Leys, Cowley Road, Headington and Summertown;*
- *focus the majority of development on previously developed land in existing built-up areas, protecting the distinctive physical form of Oxford and the general extent of the Green Belt;*
- *promote the mixed-use renaissance of the West End quarter, including significant new housing provision;*
- *promote regeneration in areas of deprivation, including through residential development at Barton, and create a landmark 'Northern Gateway' at Peartree;*
- *seek to ensure that the South Oxford Strategic Development Area is effectively integrated with the urban fabric of Oxford;*

- *maintain and enhance Oxford's environmental assets, particularly areas of ecological interest (including the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation), land of recreational value, and the City's outstanding built heritage; and*
- *protect the undeveloped flood plain, and allocate land sequentially to areas of lower flood risk.*



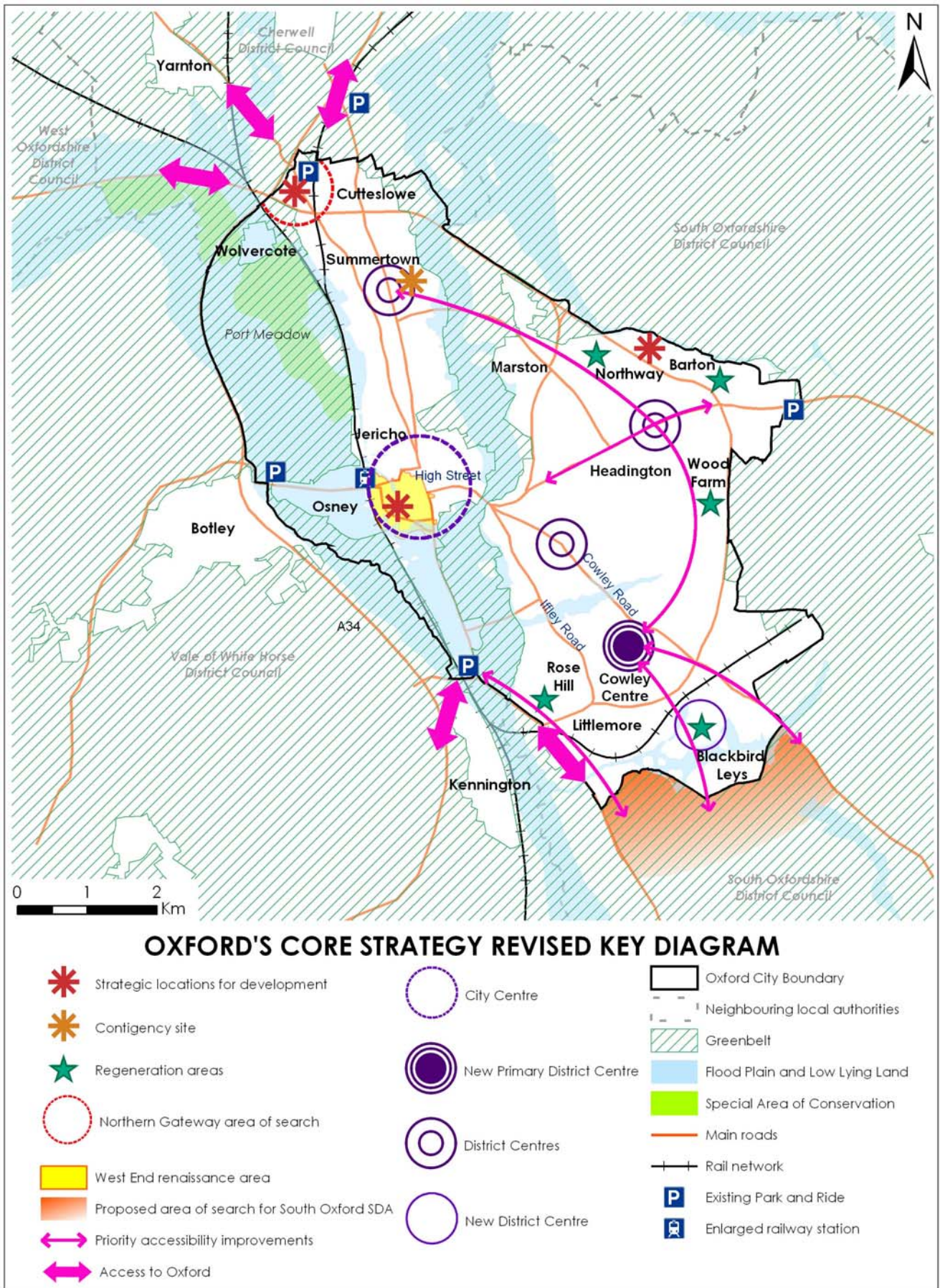


Figure 3: Revised key diagram



### 3. South Oxford Strategic Development Area

As set out in Section 1, the Panel Report identifies an area on the southern edge of Oxford as a Strategic Development Area (SDA), and the location for a future urban extension. The further preferred options below respond to this recommendation. Where a southern urban extension would significantly affect the preferred options set out in the earlier document, the options have been revised or supplemented.

#### 3.1 Strategic Development Area

The proposed South Oxford SDA would significantly contribute to meeting the City's housing need. It would also help to address the current imbalance between jobs in Oxford and opportunities to live in the City by increasing the supply of housing close to where people work, and thus help reduce the need to travel. Land on the southern edge of Oxford is well located for housing and other development, in relation to retail, health, leisure, cultural and community provision. The new development would result in at least 4,000 more dwellings adjacent to Oxford's southern boundary. Further employment development is likely to be needed, particularly in sectors related to the existing medical and academic research and development cluster in the Oxford area. The location offers good potential to minimise car-based travel. This proposal has wider implications for the existing fabric of Oxford, particularly the adjoining urban areas, and has led us to review the spatial strategy as set out in Section 2.

The South Oxford SDA would provide an opportunity to improve the existing Blackbird Leys area. Creating a sustainable community should involve enhancing local retail, commercial and community facilities that are more accessible for existing as well as new residents. The City Council will be seeking to take forward the SDA in the context of wider regeneration opportunities in the local area. We will look for strong community and functional links with the City as a whole, but in particular with Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys and Littlemore. It will be equally important, however, to ensure that new and existing communities maintain and enhance their local distinctiveness.

#### South Oxford Strategic Development Area

##### Preferred approach

Oxford City Council will work closely with South Oxfordshire District Council to produce a joint Area Action Plan (AAP) for the proposed South Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA). This will accommodate a minimum of 4,000 new dwellings, community facilities, and a mix of other uses, which may include employment.

The City Council will seek, through a joint Area Action Plan (AAP), to integrate the new community into the urban fabric of Oxford, while promoting a distinctive urban village neighbourhood.

*Supplements Section 7 of the Core Strategy Preferred Options – March 2007*

#### 3.2 Blackbird Leys centre

The previous Preferred Options document identified the potential for Blackbird Leys centre to become a mixed-use District centre. A District centre would expand the role and catchment of the existing centre to provide a broader range of facilities and services, whilst providing a strengthened focus for the community, public transport, and cycling and walking routes. In planning policy terms, designation as a District centre would be likely to increase the opportunities to attract more private investment. In contrast to established District centres (such as Summertown and Headington), the Blackbird Leys mixed-use District centre may be led by developing community, educational and employment uses ahead of retail, while maintaining flexibility on ways to realise the area's potential.

The proposed South Oxford SDA is also likely to include new local facilities and shops, creating a new community focal point. This new urban centre will need to be defined in the retail hierarchy at a later stage, as part of

detailed work on the AAP. It could meet some of the needs of Blackbird and Greater Leys and Littlemore residents, and in light of this we must consider the possibility of not developing a Blackbird Leys District centre to the extent currently envisaged. The alternative to upgrading Blackbird Leys to a District centre would be for the existing neighbourhood centre to remain a priority regeneration area, subject to significant environmental improvements and enhancement of community uses (as set out in the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016). However the range of services and facilities would not change significantly, and employment and retail expansion would be limited. The previous preferred approach for District centres and preferred option for Retail have been revised for Blackbird Leys to include an alternative option, which reflects this alternative scenario.<sup>3</sup>

The City Council has committed to producing a Blackbird Leys Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to inform the mix and location of new development within the regeneration zone and to push forward improvements in the shorter term. We remain committed in principle to upgrading Blackbird Leys as a mixed-use District centre, as a catalyst and focal point for regeneration in the community.

Blackbird Leys centre and the SDA	Pros	Cons
<p><b>Preferred option</b></p> <p>The City Council will promote a mixed-use District centre at Blackbird Leys to accommodate a broader range of facilities and services, to better serve the existing community and, potentially, neighbouring communities including the proposed urban extension.</p>	<p>Catalyst for regeneration of Blackbird Leys</p> <p>Well located for the existing community</p> <p>Supports and enhances existing commercial and community services</p> <p>Potential to increase density on brownfield sites</p>	<p>Considerable distance from some future dwellings in South Oxford SDA, and relatively close to Cowley centre</p> <p>Potential impact of competition on the new District centre from shops and services in the proposed South Oxford SDA</p>
<p><b>Alternative option 1</b></p> <p>The City Council will promote regeneration in the existing Blackbird Leys centre, but without encouraging its expansion</p>	<p>Potential for some community and environmental improvements</p> <p>Potential to improve neighbourhood centre services</p>	<p>Less opportunity to focus external investment into improving Blackbird Leys</p> <p>Less opportunity to increase density on brownfield sites</p>

Supplements Sections 3.3 & 7.2 of the Core Strategy Preferred Options – March 2007

### 3.3 Access and transport

A key benefit of the proposed South Oxford SDA would be the potential to reduce travel to reach Oxford's employment and services. This includes travel to major generators of traffic in the Grenoble Road area, such as Oxford Science Park and the Ozone leisure complex, as well as to more established areas of Oxford. However, this benefit can only be wholly fulfilled by careful planning of movement networks to integrate the urban extension with the rest of Oxford. Given Oxford's constrained road network, it is particularly important to ensure high-quality public transport, cycle and pedestrian links.

The City Council will expect the AAP for the SDA to consider how best to integrate the urban extension into Oxford's bus network, and how this might improve bus access to existing residential and employment areas. In particular, the AAP should plan for direct quality bus routes to the City centre, and to Cowley centre via Blackbird Leys. We will also seek convenient bus access to Cowley Employment Area (Watlington Road corridor, BMW and Oxford Business Park), the Headington hospitals, and other key destinations. Such improvements should

<sup>3</sup> Note that the original Preferred Option for a City-wide retail hierarchy still applies for alternative option, i.e. sequential consideration for retail uses begins with City centre; then Primary District centre; District Centres (excepting Blackbird Leys); Edge-of-centre locations; finally Neighbourhood shopping centres (including Blackbird Leys).

link with the Premium Bus Routes network and improved City orbital bus services. The AAP would also need to address wider transport and access issues outside Oxford.

The urban extension provides an excellent opportunity to implement a comprehensive local movement network, focusing on cyclist and pedestrian priority. This should include a good choice of routes to neighbouring 'urban villages', and to Cowley Employment Area and Cowley centre. Improved cycle links to the City centre, and other key destinations in Oxford, will also be sought.

The previous Preferred Options document identified a need to focus accessibility and interchange improvements on certain District centres, including Cowley. The need for such improvements at Cowley is reinforced by the proposed urban extension, which is likely to greatly increase the number of people going to and through Cowley centre in the future.

### Access and transport and the SDA

#### Preferred Approach

The City Council will work with the County Council and other partners to secure accessibility for the South Oxford SDA by developing a hierarchy of City-wide and local movement networks, which integrate with the neighbourhood areas, based on:

- high-quality, convenient bus access to the City centre, Cowley centre, and other key destinations linked by an improved orbital bus network;
- a comprehensive local network of routes that prioritise walking and cycling, with improved links to other key destinations.

In parallel with the urban extension, prioritise integrated accessibility and interchange improvements at Cowley Primary District Centre.

*Supplements Section 6.1 of the Core Strategy Preferred Options – March 2007*

## 4. Cultural and community development

The new options below seek your views on the related issues of cultural and community development. These were not previously included in the Preferred Options document published in March 2007.

### 4.1 Introduction

Cultural and community activities can be very wide ranging in nature. In seeking to achieve social inclusion and a high quality of life, the City Council's general approach is to promote accessibility to a diverse range of uses. Often this can be achieved through multiple-use of facilities on a single site.

Community facilities include community centres, meeting venues for the public or voluntary organisations, public halls and places of worship, and public houses or club premises that serve a local community. Further facilities that are not listed may also be included, which mainly provide for social interaction and community cohesion. These are important in meeting people's social and religious needs. While some community centres are provided by the City Council, other venues are provided by religious, voluntary or other private bodies. These can be publicly accessible, providing benefits to the wider community. Pubs can be an important community asset, as well as often making an important contribution to the historic legacy of Oxford.

Cultural facilities include a range of uses that would add greater diversity to the cultural scene, such as concert and theatre venues; artists studios; street events; public art; community music and dance venues; galleries, and facilities for film and digital media

In recent years, there has been growing recognition that a vibrant cultural life is a necessary ingredient of sustainable communities. Cultural activities contribute to a distinctive local identity, stimulate pride and a sense of belonging, and support individual well-being and enjoyment. Culture has an intrinsic value to both communities and visitors, bringing people together in shared experience, strengthening community bonds and making a major contribution to the quality of life. A thriving cultural sector can also deliver substantial economic benefits.

Oxford communities are home to various vibrant cultural events and arts organisations. These include the Cowley Road Carnival in East Oxford; the Oxford Literary Festival and Oxfringe; Dancing Oxford; the Pegasus Theatre, Fusion Community Arts and many others. This cultural asset base, combined with the cosmopolitan nature of Oxford's resident and visiting community, gives the City cultural vibrancy and a rising potential for excellence. Oxford is also a cultural hub for the population of Oxfordshire and neighbouring areas, a primary location for national and regional cultural and sporting facilities, and a regional centre for creative industries and for artists' higher education and training.

On a broader scale, Oxford is a city of international cultural interest, and hosts many world-class cultural organisations including the Ashmolean Museum, Modern Art Oxford and the Oxford Playhouse. Its built environment, academic heritage and status as an international publishing centre lend it that distinction, as does the enduring influence of the artists, writers and performers who are associated with the City in the world's imagination.

The Culture Strategy for Oxford sets the context and direction for culture in Oxford, whether delivered directly by the City Council, or in partnership with other organisations such as Oxfordshire County Council or the South East Economic Development Agency (SEEDA). The strategy recognises in particular the importance of promoting involvement by all in a diverse range of cultural activities, harnessing the potential of the creative and leisure industries, and supporting the development of a successful and sustained cultural sector in Oxford.

## 4.2 Options

The City Council is keen to improve the quality, accessibility and use of all community facilities where need justifies, and all cultural facilities where they contribute to cultural diversity. This would include protecting and enhancing existing facilities, whilst recognising that the needs of the community can sometimes be better met by improving facilities elsewhere, or providing new facilities on an alternative site.

The alternative would be to adopt a ‘laissez-faire’ approach, which implies no special planning policy protection for cultural and community facilities, thus treating proposals for new facilities no more favourably than any other uses.

Under the preferred option, new community facilities should be provided in locations that have good local accessibility by walking and cycling for the communities they are intended to serve, for example District and neighbourhood centres. In cases where developments are some distance from such centres, on-site provision may be required.

The City Council’s Culture Strategy identifies the West End of the City centre as a particularly important location for new and enhanced cultural facilities, aimed at benefiting a wider range of people than at present.

Cultural and community development	Pros	Cons
<p><b>Preferred option</b></p> <p>The City Council will seek to protect and encourage the enhancement of existing cultural and community facilities, unless equivalent new or improved facilities, where foreseeable need justifies this, can be provided at an equally accessible location.</p> <p>We will support the creation of new facilities that add diversity to the cultural scene. Proposals for new community facilities in accessible locations will be supported, where this will meet an existing deficiency or supports new development.</p> <p>Cultural facilities will be particularly encouraged in the West End.</p>	<p>Protects essential facilities whilst allowing flexibility to adapt to changing community needs</p> <p>More scope to improve key existing facilities</p> <p>Positively supports cultural development and diversity</p> <p>Complies with the City Council’s Culture Strategy</p>	<p>Some cultural facilities and sites or part-sites used for community uses may change use (although equivalent facilities would be provided)</p>
<p><b>Alternative option 1</b></p> <p>The City Council will not seek to protect existing facilities and land uses associated with cultural and community activities. Planning policies will not actively support new facilities.</p>	<p>A more flexible option, which does not constrain development of competing uses (e.g. housing, employment)</p>	<p>High risk of growing deficiencies in the provision of community facilities, and of Oxford’s cultural diversity being eroded</p> <p>Does not comply with the spatial vision, objectives and strategy</p> <p>Does not comply with the City Council’s culture strategy</p> <p>Does not support aspiration for Oxford to be a world-class city</p>

## 5. Responding to this document

### 5.1 How to respond

This further Preferred Options document is published for a six-week period of consultation from 7<sup>th</sup> March to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This period of consultation represents a very important part of the process, and responses made during this period will be summarised in an addendum to the Preferred Options consultation report.

The City Council wants to hear your views on these further options and welcomes your response. **Comments should focus clearly on the changes set out in this document.** Responses to the original Preferred Options document (March 2007) will continue to be used in drafting the submission Core Strategy.

Please use the questionnaire accompanying this document to respond. The questionnaire can be downloaded from the City Council's website [www.oxford.gov.uk/corestrategy](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/corestrategy). You can collect more paper copies from Oxford City Council Planning Reception, Ramsay House, 10 St. Ebbe's Street, Oxford, or request them by phoning 01865 252847.

### 5.2 What comes next?

The City Council is currently preparing the Core Strategy, and will take full account of the comments made in response to this consultation as the final document evolves. The next stages will be consultation on **draft policies** in early summer 2008, and then **formal submission** of the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State in October 2008. This will trigger a final six-week consultation period, when you may comment on whether the document is procedurally and factually sound. An independent inspector will then **examine** the Core Strategy in public in 2009. We expect the Core Strategy to be adopted by the end of 2009.