

To: City Executive Board
Date: 15 June 2017
Report of: Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan 2036 Preferred Options Consultation

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	The Oxford Local Plan 2036 has reached the preferred options stage and is ready for public consultation
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy; Meeting Housing Needs; Strong and Active Communities; A Clean and Green Oxford.
Policy Framework:	Development Plan Document.
Recommendations: That the City Executive Board resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the Oxford Local Plan 2036 Preferred Options document for consultation; and 2. Delegate Authority to the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, to make any necessary editorial corrections to the document and to agree the graphically designed version before publication. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Preferred Options Document
Appendix 2	Consultation and Engagement Programme (considered previously at CEB)
Appendix 3	Risk Assessment
Appendix 4	Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Oxford Local Plan 2036 Preferred Options document (Appendix 1) for consultation. The Oxford Local Plan 2036 Preferred Options document has been prepared for the second of three consultation stages that will take place before the Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. From 30 June-25 August 2017 we intend to undertake a Preferred Options consultation, which will meet the requirements set out in Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
2. The Local Plan is important because it will shape how Oxford develops. It will set out how we want our City to look and feel; it will guide new developments to the right locations whilst protecting and improving the environment and people's quality of life; it will help deliver the new homes, businesses, jobs, shops, and infrastructure needed to support the growth of Oxford over the next 20 years to 2036. It will be used in determining planning applications and to guide investment decisions across the City. We want to make sure that Oxford continues to be a successful and attractive city; the kind of place people enjoy living in, working in and visiting.

The Preferred Options Document

3. The Preferred Options document (Appendix 1) offers a range of policy options, summarises the expected outcomes of selecting different options and gives some detail on how they might be implemented. It also explains why certain options have been put forward as preferred, showing other policy approaches that were considered, and whether these are alternatives or rejected options. Key components of the Preferred Options document are as follows:

Vision

4. The first section of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 Preferred Options document draws on various sources of data and background information to describe Oxford's strengths and role and the challenges it faces over the next 20 years. It goes on to present a vision for Oxford in 2036. The vision is summarised as:
 - A centre for learning, knowledge and innovation;
 - A prosperous city with opportunities for all;
 - An environmentally aware city;
 - An enjoyable city to live in and visit;
 - A strong community;
 - A healthy place.
5. The vision for Oxford is that the opportunities that exist for the city, its residents and those who work in and visit it are fully utilised. Oxford will continue to have a strong economy, contributing to advancements in learning and innovation locally, nationally and globally. Oxford's population will all benefit from the opportunities of the knowledge economy. The city will continue to grow and develop, and this growth will be associated with a liveable and sustainable environment.

Economy

6. The local plan strategy is to help support Oxford's role as a fast-growing city, generating economic growth for the local and national economy. The Employment Land Assessment (ELA) (2016, AECOM) looked at demand for new employment space and reviewed existing employment sites in terms of current performance and their ability to meet requirements in future. The Oxford Employment Land Assessment 2016 found that demand for employment land is in excess of current supply. Oxford has an important role in the knowledge economy, and many of these enterprises need to cluster together. However, a lack of housing, particularly affordable housing, is also a potential threat to supporting further growth and continued success of Oxford's economy. Therefore, rather than looking for significant new sites for employment uses, the preferred options aim to:

- Prioritise more job intensive uses within the city, and those which need to be in Oxford. To not protect B8 warehousing sites for that use where it is not essential that they're located in Oxford where land is scarce, but allow their loss to other employment-generating uses or non-residential uses that benefit the local community;
- Protect key B2 industrial uses, as alongside B1 office uses these uses also make an important contribution to the economy of Oxford, also ensuring a diverse employment base;
- Promote intensification on existing sites.

Mix of housing and affordable housing

7. There is a huge and urgent need for new homes in Oxford, but also a constrained supply. The main evidence about housing need in Oxford is the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which was commissioned by the six Oxfordshire local authorities. The SHMA found the 'objectively assessed need' (OAN) for Oxford to 2031 is a range between 24,000 to 32,000. The mid-point of 28,000 is being taken as the housing need to 2031. An update to cover the period to 2036 will be required. Most recent calculations of the capacity for new housing in Oxford make clear that the objectively assessed need for housing cannot be delivered within the city. The preferred option for the Local Plan is to set a target based on capacity. The partnership of the 6 Oxfordshire local authorities that forms the Oxfordshire Growth Board is working to ensure the overall housing needs of the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area are met in accordance with national policy.

8. Oxford's very high need for new housing means that general market house prices are expensive for both buying and renting. Difficulties accessing housing can mean that employers can struggle to find and keep staff, affecting desirability of locating in Oxford and making it more difficult to run important services such as schools and hospitals. A suite of preferred options has been developed to attempt to address this issue; key of these are:

- To continue to require affordable housing contributions from all sites, starting at those with capacity for 2 dwellings or more, as

it is considered that local need overrides the Written Ministerial Statement that suggests 10 dwellings as the starting point for affordable housing contributions;

- To continue to prioritise the delivery of social rented dwellings on-site for developments of 10 or more units;
- In certain circumstances to allow schemes that deliver 100% affordable housing of intermediate types to come forward without meeting the usual requirements for social rented housing. Facilitating employers such as the universities and hospitals to help meet their own housing generated needs by building for their workers on their own land;
- To change the threshold for requiring a specified mix of housing sizes to 25, which would mean greater number of 1-2 bed units, and fewer family sized or larger homes

Student accommodation

9. A student accommodation needs study (2017) has been undertaken, which indicates that 13,467 additional student rooms would be required to 2026 if all students at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University were to be accommodated in university-provided accommodation. It also found that 2,034 of the students in other educational institutions were accommodated in purpose built student accommodation, either on short or long-term lease to the institutions, or owned by them. Various preferred options respond to this:

- Preferred option to prioritise occupation of all new speculative student accommodation schemes to students of the 2 universities only (ie it would not be permitted for language schools or other uses that do not form a fundamental part of Oxford's knowledge economy).

Green Infrastructure protection and improvement

10. Oxford benefits from a wide range of green spaces which, individually and as a network, perform important social, environmental and economic functions and are valued by local people. A Green Infrastructure Assessment is being carried out to assess all open spaces for their GI value (including consideration of future potential). A draft of this assessment will be published at the same time as the Preferred Options document. The assessment will be refined in time for the publication of the draft Local Plan in summer 2018, to focus more on potential opportunities and the potential to create networks that join outside of the city.

11. The Plan will focus on ensuring that green spaces are as high-quality and as multi-functional as possible, with public access particularly valued, as well as ensuring a network of green spaces with connecting wildlife corridors and green accessible routes.

- In addition to specific protections for sites with strong biodiversity value, allotments, and open air sports facilities, the Plan will look to protect open spaces for their Green Infrastructure value, either because they are part of a green network or because they are well-used spaces offering a variety of opportunities and benefits.

Greenfield sites for development

12. If it can lead to improvements in the quality and increased public access to other green spaces, the Preferred Options Document suggests that consideration will be given in appropriate circumstances to allocating green spaces for development in order to help meet the development needs of Oxford. Where the Green Infrastructure assessment has suggested sites are not well used and located, do not offer a variety of functions, where they have little potential for improvement, and where a limited amount of development could lead to significant improvements of green space and public access on or close to the site, they have been considered and assessed as potential development sites. The majority of sites are performing well in terms of Green Infrastructure, but those under consideration for allocation for development in this way include.

- William Morris Close;
- Ex Iffley Mead Playing Field;
- Some sites in Green Belt:

Green Belt

13. Given the exceptional economic circumstances that exist in Oxford, and the housing pressures that flow from this, Green Belt areas that perform poorly as Green Infrastructure and where there are not insurmountable environmental constraints (such as being in Flood Zone 3b (functional flood plain) or a SSSI), and where there is potential landowner interest in development, were assessed in a Green Belt Study. This was undertaken by LUC for the Council using the same method and assumptions as the joint Oxfordshire wide assessment of the Green Belt, to ensure a consistent assessment of sites inside and outside of Oxford. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of potential development of those sites on the integrity of the remaining Green Belt. The preferred approach outlined in the Preferred Options document is that the council is inclined to allocate for development a number of sites that the Green Belt Study has identified as having a low to moderate impact on the purposes of the Oxford Green Belt. These sites are:

- The site opposite Redbridge Park and Ride;
- 2 sites on the western edge of Marston and 1 on the eastern side (Marston Paddock)
- A small area next to St Catherine's College;
- Two sites to the north of the city adjoining potential development sites in Cherwell District Council's area (St Frideswide Farm and adjoining Northern Gateway)

Flood risk

14. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 (2016) was commissioned, which results in an update of flood risk mapping. Discussions have also

taken place with the Environment Agency about a possible approach to flood risk in already developed areas that would potentially allow development to take place in already developed areas at high risk of flooding if sufficient mitigation measures can be put in place. This is so that previously developed land in the flood plain is not unnecessarily sterilised from intensification.

Movement, improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions

15. Most air pollution in Oxford comes from diesel and petrol powered modes of transport. In addition to contributing to air pollution, transport also contributes to carbon emissions. The ability to reduce harmful emissions will depend on a variety of measures. Development that attracts a lot of people will be focused on transport hubs in the city centre and elsewhere to make walking, cycling and public transport options more attractive and viable. Preferred options designed to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainable modes of travel include:

- Where new routes are identified in the transport strategy as having potential to create new and improvement public realm areas, improve the transport network and deliver more sustainable movement patterns, they will be safeguarded or required to be implemented if running through an allocated site.
- Providing infrastructure to support low emission vehicles and sustainable modes of travel, such as bike parking and facilities and electric charging points;
- Requiring new residential development to meet a carbon reduction target;
- Supporting appropriate measures to sustainably retrofit existing homes and non-residential buildings;
- Safeguarding the land needed for new stations for the Cowley Branch line, to allow it to be reopened for passenger trains, including at Oxford Business Park and Oxford Science Park, along with any land needed for improvements to the line

Historic environment and character

Oxford's long history is reflected in outstanding buildings and features. It is important to deliver new development in a way that respects and compliments this rich history, the historic buildings, parks and gardens; conservation areas, archaeology and areas of distinct local character and townscape. The preferred options promote the positive management of change, reflecting the city's capacity to move forward and consolidate its built form, while preserving its irreplaceable heritage.

- Continue to define view cones and a high buildings area but instead of a rigid height limit introduce a set of criteria for assessing the impact of proposals for higher buildings on the skyline (based on the View Cones Study)
- Policy supporting more intensive development setting out requirements for taller buildings, including appropriate location/height; massing; orientation; the relation of the building to the street; and exceptional design to support higher density development

Sustainability Appraisal

A Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out to assess the options against the Sustainability objectives. This has built on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report that was published last year as part of the First Steps consultation. This work has informed the selection of preferred options. Outcomes of the Sustainability Appraisal are summarised in the main body of the Preferred Options Document. The Sustainability Appraisal will be published alongside the Preferred Options Document and also available for consultation.

Consultation

16. The consultation responses and engagement are an important input in forming the Local Plan. The Consultation and Engagement Programme was considered at CEB on 21st January 2016 at the same time as the Local Development Scheme, which set the programme for production of the Local Plan. Engagement and consultation will also be consistent with the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning, and appropriate to the stage. The Consultation and Engagement Programme is attached in Appendix 2
17. Consultation so far has closely followed the Consultation and Engagement Programme. During June, July and August last year the First Steps consultation took place to get early input into the Plan. That was not a statutorily required consultation but followed best practice, and the results of that consultation have informed the content of the Preferred Options Document. A summary of the consultation responses was published on the City Council website in the Autumn. The Preferred Options document also includes a brief summary of the consultation responses received relating to each topic to show how the responses to the First Steps consultation have informed the options.
18. The aim of the Preferred Options stage of consultation is to inform and check the direction that the plan is going in. We anticipate that there will be a wide range of views to be considered from different communities and interests within and outside the city. The Evidence base and Government policy will also be important in informing policy direction, together with professional judgement. We aim to be clear at all stages of consultation and engagement that there are constraints to what can be included in a Plan, and that the engagement process is a chance for people to put forward views that will help inform the direction of the plan.
19. Wide-ranging publicity of the publication of the Preferred Options document, and the opportunities for engagement, will be required. This will involve contacting directly all those previously involved in the Local Plan and who have registered interest on planning documents. The front page of the website will advertise the Preferred Options consultation. Posters will be distributed around the city noticeboards and officers will be available with an exhibition at events across the city, such as farmers' markets, festival and fetes, and the Cowley Road Carnival. Local interest groups will also be contacted and asked to inform their own members of the consultation. Press releases will be sent out.

20. Various methods of response will be available, ranging from the opportunity to comment on all of the options in the document, either online, in writing or by email, to a more simple questionnaire that will not need to be read alongside the full Preferred Options Document. Workshops will be held for those who wish to have a detailed discussion of the options. There will also be the chance to make short comments using post-it notes at the travelling exhibition. Social media techniques will be used to both publicise the consultation, improving our reach and engagement, and also to give people the opportunity to make comments.

Financial implications

21. The costs associated with the production of the Local Plan, including the consultation, are being met through the Local Plan budget and resources of the Planning Policy team.

Legal issues

22. There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report. There are legal requirements that must be followed through the production of the Local Plan, which will be considered by the Inspector at Examination.

23. The process for preparing the Local Plan is set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Under Regulation 18 of the 2012 Regulation the County must notify such bodies or persons as the local planning authority consider may have an interest in the local plan and invite each of them to make representations about what a local plan ought to contain. The consultation must include local residents or other persons carrying on business in the local planning authority's area, together with adjoining local authorities and other statutory bodies. In preparing the plan, the Council must take into account any representation made to them in response to the invitations. The approach recommended will meet the requirements set out in Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for this stage of consultation.

24. After the Council has completed this round of consultation, there has to be a further round of consultation, known as the 'proposed submission' plan (under Regulation 19). The adopted timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme envisages the proposed submission plan being published for consultation in June/July 2018.

Level of risk

25. The completed Risk Register is attached as Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

26. A two-stage approach to the Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) is being followed for the Local Plan project. The first phase comprises of an initial assessment of the policy areas within the Preferred Options Document (attached as Appendix 4). Views on this assessment will be sought as part the Preferred Options Consultation.

27. The second phase of the EQIA will look at the policies as they will be drafted in the Proposed Submission Document. Consultation on that phase of the EqIA will be combined with the next round of public engagement in June 2018.

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