

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 March 2021
Report of: Head of Planning Services
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan Local Development Scheme 2021-26

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present for approval the updated programme for the preparation of documents that will form the Council's Local Plan.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery
Corporate Priority:	Enable an inclusive economy; Deliver more affordable housing; Support thriving communities; Pursue a zero carbon Oxford.
Policy Framework:	Local Plan
Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1. Approve the Oxford Local Development Scheme 2021-26	
Appendices	
Appendix 1	Local Development Scheme 2021-26
Appendix 2	Risk Assessment

Introduction and background

- The Oxford Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a project plan that specifies which local development documents are development plan documents and sets out timescales for the preparation and revision of documents forming part of Oxford City Council's Development Plan and other planning policy documents. The term Development Plan can be used as the collective name for a number of planning policy documents, including development plan documents but supplementary planning documents, whilst adopted by the Council following public consultation, do not form part of the statutory Development Plan. The Local Plan is the name for the document that contains the majority of the Council's statutory planning policies.

2. The LDS provides details on what the Development Plan documents will contain and the geographical areas they will cover. The LDS is an important tool to enable local communities and interested parties to keep track of the Development Plan documents' progress and to ensure that they are aware of when opportunities for involvement are likely to arise. It is a statutory requirement that all local planning authorities prepare and maintain a LDS.
3. The lifespan of the Council's current LDS is 2020-25. The LDS is intended to be a dynamic document, updated at intervals to reflect the timetable for developing the Development Plan and other significant work programmes, hence the relatively short timeframe between the LDSs. The LDS 2021-26 will come into effect from the date of approval by Cabinet and will supersede the existing LDS 2020-25.
4. The work programme focuses primarily on actions to ensure successful implementation of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 in 2021/22 and the beginning of the preparation of the new Local Plan 2040, alongside continuing to support the work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It also includes putting in place the West End Supplementary Planning Document to support the significant growth identified for this area in the Local Plan;
5. In 2021/22 the Council will also begin work on early informal engagement on the Local Plan 2040 and put in place a revised Statement of Community Involvement for Planning to inform the next Local Plan.
6. This update to the LDS is required because of some changes to the work programmes since the 2020-2025 LDS. A new timetable for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has been agreed at the Growth Board, which has delayed some stages because of the impacts of Covid-19 on the work programme. The original programme for the Oxford Local Plan 2040 still fits in with this and so no revisions are proposed to that programme. The timetable for the West End SPD has been extended. This now aligns with the Oxford Station masterplan, which was not previously proposed as an SPD but now is, and which may or may not be incorporated within the West End SPD. That document is now therefore included in the LDS. The review of the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule has been removed from the LDS. This is due to proposals in the White Paper, "Planning for the Future" that could significantly alter the way infrastructure may be funded. This project is therefore on hold until further information is known about what may happen. Instead, work has focused on updating the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which will inform the now annually required Infrastructure Funding Statement, as well as the Local Plan 2040 and a review of the CIL Charging Schedule if that does go ahead.
7. From 2021/22 a significant focus of the work programme will be on the Oxford Local Plan 2040 and continued engagement on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 to ensure that it is aligned with it and that it is aligned with other Oxfordshire Local Plans. The timetable for the Local Plan is informed by several factors but the key drivers are explained further in the relevant section of this report and Appendix 1 and include:

- aligning timeframes to follow key stages of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 so that the plan can take account of the strategic policies effectively;
- ensuring alignment in plan periods with neighbouring authorities to ensure that the Oxfordshire Plan making is aligned;
- ensuring that there is sufficient time to reflect on what is working from the current Local Plan and implications of the Covid-19 pandemic to inform the next plan; and
- allowing sufficient time to engage iteratively as the plan emerges.

Development Plan documents

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

8. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will set out strategic policies to deal with key issues for Oxfordshire with a cross-boundary approach. The plan period for the Oxfordshire Plan is 2020 to 2050.
9. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will cover the administrative county area of Oxfordshire. This will comprise the local planning authorities of:
 - Cherwell District Council
 - Oxford City Council
 - South Oxfordshire District Council
 - Vale of White Horse District Council; and
 - West Oxfordshire District Council.
10. The Oxfordshire Plan will be a formal Development Plan Document, prepared under Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) which enables two or more local planning authorities to agree a joint Plan. It will form part of the development plan for each of the authorities in Oxfordshire and will be used in the formulation of more detailed plans locally and in determining planning applications where appropriate. The scope of the Oxfordshire Plan was developed in the Scoping Document¹ which was agreed by the partner authorities in October 2018 and endorsed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board.
11. A Regulation 18 Part 1 consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was undertaken in June 2019. Work on the Plan will be undertaken during the LDS period, with the intention of adopting the Plan in May/June 2023. The latest timetable was presented to the Oxfordshire Growth Board in November 2020 for endorsement, replacing the timetable from September 2019 and the revision was an initial response to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in June 2020.

Oxford Local Plan 2020-2040

12. The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036, was only recently adopted (8th June 2020), therefore it contains policies based on recent evidence and is compliant with current guidance. However, government guidance requires that all Plans are

¹ Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan Scoping Document (Oct 2018)

reviewed every 5 years. Given that a Local Plan takes considerable time to produce, a review must be started a relatively short time after adoption of a Local Plan. In this case there are several reasons for expediting the start of this review. One of these is the need to co-ordinate plans across Oxfordshire. This will help to avoid the issue of trying to apportion housing need generated across the whole county and calculated for a particular period, between local plans that have differing base and end dates. A plan must cover at least 15 years from adoption.

A great amount of flexibility has been built into the Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 in order to deal with a twenty year period. The Covid-19 pandemic could mean unpredictable and unanticipated changes. Paragraph 39 of the Inspectors' report pronounces that: 'the examination hearings took place before the Covid-19 epidemic. Whilst the short-term effects are here for all to see, there is currently no evidence that the fundamental assumptions and requirements of the plan in respect of housing need, or indeed any other strategic matter, will be affected to the extent that its soundness will be undermined.'

13. The Oxford Local Plan 2036 has made big strides forward that will support the city in managing the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and support the city in building back better. The effectiveness of policies are always monitored and this will be important in understanding the scope of the new Local Plan. The Council needs to give enough time to understand how the new policies are working and better understand any challenges posed by Covid-19 before taking action. Through the process of producing another local plan the needs and opportunities that emerge can be understood properly considered collectively and ensure that the response to the crisis is not reactionary. It can also seek to balance carefully issues such as the road to zero carbon, inequalities and the quality of the built and natural environment as the existing Local Plan does and seek to build upon these comprehensively.

14. The Oxford Local Plan 2040 will need to be adopted by 2025 at the latest in order for it to have 15 years to run from adoption and to meet the legal requirements to complete a review within 5 years of adopting a development plan. Officers consider that significant stakeholder engagement and input will be needed in the early stages to try and clarify what key issues need addressing, particularly given the unprecedented events associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The LDS 2020-25 is therefore proposing the following timetable for production of the Oxford Local Plan 2040:

Local Plan stage	Programme LDS 2020-25
Issues and Scope/Options Consultation	June/July 2021
Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18)	June/July 2022
Proposed Submission Consultation (Regulation 19)	June/July 2023
Submission (Regulation 22)	December 2023

Inspector's Report	January 2025
Adoption (Regulation 26)	March 2025

15. The indicative timetable above shows that the adoption of the Local Plan 2040 is expected to occur around March 2025, which would meet the expectation of allowing it to run 15 years after adoption to 2040. These timescales have sought to allow enough time for:
- evidence gathering that can reflect on the implications of the current pandemic and other key issues comprehensively;
 - several rounds of engagement; and
 - enough flexibility to align to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in a way that enables the Oxford Local Plan to utilise evidence and build upon the strategic policies it seeks to bring forward.
16. The timetable after the plan has been submitted for examination is not within the City Council's control. The timescales assumed from submissions to adoption broadly reflect those experienced with the Oxford Local Plan 2036.

Neighbourhood Plans

17. The remaining neighbourhood areas, which are at various stages of plan production, are:
- Littlemore; and
 - Wolvercote.
18. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan was due to have its referendum in May 2020. However, [government published guidance in April 2020](#) outlines changes that have been introduced to neighbourhood planning in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This referendum is now postponed until 6th May 2021 as regulations linked to the Coronavirus Act 2020 postpone all neighbourhood planning referendums until then.
19. In response to these delays, the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan can be given significant weight in decision-making, so far as the plan is material to the application. This is due to the fact that the council has issued a decision statement detailing its intention to send the neighbourhood plan to referendum. This was approved at Cabinet in October 2019.

Other planning documents

West End SPD

20. Much of the West End is under- utilised and does not reflect Oxford's international reputation or live up to its potential. The role of the SPD is to provide some detailed advice and guidance to show how working with landowners, partners and key stakeholders, regeneration can be delivered. The West End is also identified as a key opportunity in the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy that identifies the areas as an Innovation District. The principle of undertaking an SPD for the West End has been discussed informally with key stakeholders and is widely supported.

21. There are currently several supporting documents that cover the West End area. These include:
 - Oxpens Masterplan SPD (November 2013)
 - West End Design Code (2008)
 - Oxford Station SPD (November 2017)
22. There had also previously been a West End Area Action Plan but this has already expired and no longer forms part of the current development plan.
23. The new West End SPD will replace these documents and provide detailed guidance to support the over-arching policies in the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 in a single document.
24. Policy AOC1: West End and Osney Mead and Policy SP1: Sites in the West End set the strategic policy context for the West End Area, within the Area of Change. It therefore provides the opportunity for an SPD to provide some further detailed advice and guidance on these adopted development plan policies to manage change within this area. The bullet points in Policy AOC1: West End and Osney Mead help to provide the scope for the SPD. These set out the need for:
 - High density urban living
 - Vibrant mix of uses
 - Maximising contribution to Oxfordshire's knowledge economy
 - Improved public realm
 - Better connections for all users, including across the rivers
 - Improved space for pedestrians and cyclists
 - Respect for the heritage of the area
 - Development of a well-designed transport interchange around the station
 - Reduce the amount of car parking
25. The complex issues present in the West End means the SPD will have a key focus on creative and deliverable solutions to achieve a co-ordinated approach to development and comprehensive regeneration. It will seek to provide clarity on what is needed to support the development in this area. The intention is that this will include detailed information on infrastructure that is needed to facilitate and support the change. Masterplanning of key sites will be included in the SPD as part of providing locational specific guidance. Work on the masterplanning of Oxford Station has already commenced due to specific needs around that site. This will be reviewed and embedded as appropriate into the guidance in the West End SPD.
26. In accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning, two key consultations will be undertaken alongside ongoing engagement. The first will be to consult on the scope of the SPD. This is expected to begin in March 2021. This will include the reasons for producing the SPD and identifying its geographic scope and key deliverables. The second consultation will be on the draft SPD and

this is expected in Feb/March 2022. More informal engagement will also happen throughout the preparation of the document.

Oxford Station SPD

27. The Oxford Railway Station Masterplan will set the framework for future development at the station. It will guide the location, nature, size and operating conditions of particular uses. As well as the wider network upgrades, the regeneration of Oxford Station will act as a catalyst for wider redevelopment and regeneration in the West End and city centre. Whilst the Masterplan will not have the weight of a Local Plan policy, it will be adopted by the City Council and be considered as a material consideration when determining planning applications. It will be developed as an SPD and will either be a standalone SPD, or it is more likely will become absorbed into the West End SPD.

Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (SCI)

28. The Statement of Community Involvement in Planning sets out how the Council will involve the community in the planning process, including Local Plans and Development Management. It sets out the activities that the Council will undertake to reach stakeholders and the public during the various stages of preparation of Local Development documents. The most recent SCI was adopted on 9th July 2015. It can be viewed at www.oxford.gov.uk/sci.
29. An Addendum to the SCI was approved by Cabinet on 8th June 2020. This was a focussed update on how the Council will amend its approach during the restrictions imposed by Government during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is available on the City Council's [website](#).
30. Work is underway to update the SCI. The consultation draft of the updated SCI was agreed at Cabinet on 20th January 2021. Following consultation, the SCI will be revised and brought to Cabinet for adoption in June 2021.

Annual Monitoring Report

31. Each year the City Council produces an Annual Monitoring Report. This will be taken for Cabinet approval in November 2021 for publication in December 2021. The Annual Monitoring report published in December 2021 will be reporting on the monitoring year 2020/21.
32. The Annual Monitoring Report has the following main functions:
- to measure progress made in respect of the planning documents being prepared;
 - to review the effectiveness of the adopted planning policies;
 - to monitor the extent to which policies and targets in adopted documents are being achieved against a range of indicators.

Financial implications

33. The timetable of the Local Development Scheme has been structured to enable key work to progress whilst minimising financial implications.
34. The work in the 2021/22 financial year is focussed around putting in place the guidance around the implementation of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 (including the West End SPD), updating the Council's infrastructure delivery plans, and some

early informal engagement on issues around the next Local Plan including reviewing the Statement of Community Involvement. This is to ensure the successful delivery of the Local Plan, which the Council has invested in over several years. This work will be resourced by existing Planning Policy staff and almost fully funded by the existing Planning Policy budgets including CIL budget where applicable.

35. A key cost will be the new Local Plan 2040. It is a statutory requirement for Councils to have an up to date Local Plan in place and to complete a review of their Local Plans every 5 years. This LDS shows how the Council intends to meet this requirement by completing the review by 2025. The financial implications arising from producing a Local Plan include the costs of a Local Plan Examination (including Counsel's advice) and independent technical analysis of issues such as transport, environment and sustainability. Revenue to accommodate these anticipated costs will come out of the existing annual budget allocated to Planning Policy. This budget supported the Oxford Local Plan 2036 production and was sufficient for the majority of the programme. However, during the examination the intensive costs within that financial year were funded from a reserve created for local plan costs, which is now depleted. There is a risk that additional budget will be required again given that, as set out above, the next Local Plan is likely to be a full rather than partial review. It is likely that Planning Policy will need to seek a growth bid to support the additional costs of the Local Plan, especially as most of the evidence base will be required in year 2 and the substantial legal and Planning Inspectorate costs will be in year 4. The examination is currently anticipated to take place in 2024/25 financial year. The adoption of a reviewed Local Plan within 5 years of the adoption of the current one is a statutory requirement. Not undertaking this work will result in the City Council having an out of date local plan and having less control over managing growth within Oxford.

Legal issues

36. The preparation and publication of the Local Development Scheme is a statutory requirement under Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).
37. The Council is required to monitor compliance with the timescales for document production and their revision set out in the LDS and to make this information publicly available. Compliance with the LDS is monitored and published through the Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

Level of risk

38. A risk assessment has been undertaken (Appendix 2). All risks have been mitigated to an acceptable level.

Equalities impact

39. There are no equalities impacts arising from this report.

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Background Papers: None

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