

To: Cabinet
Date: 15th June 2022
Report of: Director of Development
Title of Report: Oxford's Economic Strategy – Consultation Report and Recommendations

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	Following the recent consultation, to note the recommended revisions to Oxford's Economic Strategy and adopt the document
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Susan Brown, Leader and Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	Enabling an Inclusive Economy
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Notes the recommended changes to the Consultation version of Oxford's Economic Strategy as set out in Appendix 3 to this report
2.	Adopt and publish the revised version of Oxford's Economic Strategy at Appendix 1

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Oxford's Economic Strategy Part 1 and 2 – Consultation Draft
Appendix 2	Consultation Report – Oxford's Economic Strategy
Appendix 3	Revisions Log and Officer Responses
Appendix 4	Risk Assessment
Appendix 5	Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council has led the commissioning and preparation of Oxford's Economic Strategy (OES) published as Consultation Draft on 22nd November 2021. The Council has engaged widely with stakeholders and the community in order to do so. The OES is intended to be a stakeholder owned plan that guide a partnership approach to the Sustainable Economic Development. The OES cannot be delivered fully in isolation and seeks collaboration across partners and stakeholders across the community.
2. The OES was first commissioned in late 2019. It was paused in spring 2020 to prioritise the Council's response to the Pandemic and to adjust it following the significant societal and economic impacts brought about. To assist with preparing the documents, the input of Oxford's Economic Growth Steering Board (OSP sub-group) was sought throughout. This is an advisory group consisting of representatives from businesses, the city and county councils and anchor institutions.
3. Over the next ten years, the OES seeks to establish a new standard for economic inclusion in the city. This will be underpinned by an impactful and purposeful global city economy, evolving in a way which recognises the environmental limits of growth and harnesses the opportunity of a new zero carbon economy. Its three key themes, 'Inclusive Economy', 'Global Impact' and 'Net Zero' are given parity and underpinned by a range of proposed guiding principles and actions contained within a detailed Delivery Plan. The aim, wherever possible, is to ensure all priority actions contribute to these three core themes.
4. The OES was open to public consultation running from 22nd November 2021 to 31st January 2022. The OES consultation was extended until 31st January to ensure residents had the opportunity to respond after growth in interest in the last few days of the consultation. The Consultation aimed to capture respondents' priorities, ideas, concerns, and participation in the Economic Strategy.

Summary of the consultation process for Oxford's Economic Strategy

5. The consultation consisted of a blend of methods, including one to one meetings, workshops, consultation events (see Table 1) and a questionnaire. These were supplemented by press, opinion pieces, social media and mailshots to business databases, Residents panel and community networks. By the end of the consultation period 244 responses were received; 147 via the online portal and 97 by email. 114 people/organisational representatives were involved in events or meetings during the consultation period, with some overlap between attendees and formal respondents.

Table 1: OES consultation events

Oxford's Economic Strategy Business & Partner Workshop
14 December 2021 – 45 attendees
Joint Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan, Business Workshop
12 January, 2022 – 44 attendees
Inclusive Transport & Movement Group

6. The following findings can be summarised from the Consultation Survey.
- a. Over 63% were responding as an 'individual living in Oxford' and with 21% as a 'business or organisation' based in Oxford or near with links to the city.
 - b. 65% of respondents felt the OES had partially (47%) or fully (18%) captured the right issues and challenges affecting Oxford's economy. 33% felt that it had not fully captured the issues and challenges faced.
 - c. 43% agreed or strongly agreed with the Strategy's key themes of transition to an Inclusive, Global, and Net Zero economy. With 16% neutral and 39% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
 - d. 60% agreed or strongly agreed that Oxford, as a centre for technology and innovation, has an important role in the success of the UK and regional economy. With 22% neutral and 15% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
 - e. 67% agreed to a great or some extent that the principles and associated projects support the strategy's Global City ambition. With 22% stating 'to no extent' and 11% not answering.
 - f. Inclusive: 80% agreed with the Inclusive Economy ambition for Oxford's economy. With 4% neutral, and 7% not agreeing.
 - g. Inclusive 68% of respondents agreed the principles and associated projects support the Inclusive City strategic ambition (12% to a great extent, 56% to some extent). 24% answered 'to no extent at all'
 - h. Net Zero - 80% agreed with the Net Zero ambition for Oxford's economy (61% strongly).
 - i. Net Zero: 76% agreed that the Zero Carbon principles and associated projects support the strategic ambition (54% to some extent, 54% to some extent)
7. Inclusive Theme: When asked which of the principles are most important to delivering this strategic ambition, the top themes were
- Support local people to access skills, training and education opportunities and adapt to the expected rapid structural changes to the economy
 - Explore options to deliver more affordable travel to employment and education using public transport, cycling and walking.
 - Focus recovery efforts on the needs of the most disadvantaged places, through community wealth building and community economic development.
 - Further develop and build on the Oxford Living Wage initiative (OLW) to embed the principles of a minimum standard of prosperity.
8. Net Zero Theme: When asked which of the principles are most important to delivering this strategic ambition, the top themes were
- Mitigate the environmental impacts of new development and housing growth

- Measure and reduce the environmental impacts of existing economic activity
 - Empower Oxford businesses to decarbonise their operations and supply chains
 - Deliver the Zero Emission Zone and the next phase of the strategy to reduce emissions/improve air quality in the city
9. Global Theme: When asked which of the principles are most important to delivering the strategic ambition, the top themes were
- Expedite transport, digital and energy developments.
 - Increase the commercial space focusing on Life Sciences, Low Carbon, Digital and knowledge sectors.
 - (Local skills) enable the city’s resident population to be a bigger part of its success.
 - Continue to support business to adapt to changing circumstances
10. It should be noted that a campaign named ‘Transform Oxford’s Economic Strategy’ was formed alongside the formal consultation. This has received 472 petition signatures (as of 6th May) based on the statement that the OES is ‘*not fit for Oxford now or in the future as it sets global ambition and growth above the needs of ALL Oxford’s residents and does not take the urgent action needed to address inequality and the climate and ecological emergencies. Oxford City Council should withdraw its draft proposal and create a new economic strategy that is truly inclusive and fit for the future - in collaboration with all Oxford’s residents and community groups and stakeholders - using a suitable framework such as Doughnut Economics to allow a holistic approach that meets the needs of everyone within planetary boundaries.*’ This campaign was associated with some misinformation or misunderstanding of the strategy including the following. See the table below;

Challenge raised	Response
<i>It puts global ambition before equality and the climate crisis and these aims are irreconcilable</i>	The strategy is aligned with the Citizen’s Assembly on climate change and Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire recommendations. It is the clear intention that the three pillars are intended to have equal emphasis. We have initiated and funded a countywide partnership to address inequality with partner Las and cross sector partners – the Inclusive Economy Partnership
<i>It provides many more jobs than homes, which will drive up house prices</i>	The OES is following the homes and employment space allocations already made in Oxford Local Plan 2036 and neighbouring local plans. The OES is not proposing any additional sites for development in this strategy.
<i>All the new homes and roads, and congestion will damage the local environment and create air pollution</i>	No new roads are proposed. The OES supports fundamental investments in net zero carbon transport infrastructure and active and public transport travel infrastructure as a top priority, sought through the new Local Transport Plan;

<p><i>It does not meet residents needs and we should start again with a new approach based on Doughnut Economics –</i></p> <p>NB. The Doughnut, or Doughnut economics, is a visual framework for sustainable development – shaped like a doughnut or lifebelt – combining the concept of planetary boundaries with the complementary concept of social boundaries.</p>	<p>Oxford’s Economic Strategy (Consultation Draft) was in part inspired by the Doughnut Economics Model, and a range of approaches related to sustainable economic development. It proposed an ambition to seek minimum standards of economic and social prosperity for residents related to themes like housing, income, employment, participation and democracy, alongside Net Zero and broader sustainability emergencies (bio-diversity, waste and air quality).</p> <p>It states we will set the basis for enhanced participation and a stronger commitment to grassroots economic activity. As part of the delivery of the strategy, community participation in decision making and design of economic initiatives will be pursued, including using community engagement tools available from the Doughnut Economics Action Lab as appropriate.</p>
<p><i>Development planned in every direction for Oxford make it plain that the Oxford Economic Strategy means entirely to dispense with West Oxford meadows’</i></p>	<p>This is inaccurate as any development proposed is in line with the Oxford Local Plan 2036 and does not propose to build on the meadows</p>
<p><i>Growth is being pursued as a goal in itself</i></p>	<p>Oxford’s economy is already a global one, with global investment in our world-leading universities, innovation and medical research companies. This strategy seeks to manage this in a sustainable approach to economic development where Oxford’s economy evolves and recovers following the pandemic. Our local economy lost 2,500 jobs during the pandemic but the residual strength of the economy means that investment continues to come into our city and it should be in a good position to recover well. The strategy seeks economic development that contributes to societal gain, mitigates environmental damage and enhances environmental gains.</p>

Recommended Revisions to Oxford’s Economic Strategy

11. The consultation process has produced a range of useful data and insights. The Consultation Report (Appendix 2) provides an overall review of the Consultation findings, themes and recommendations that follow. It is accompanied by the Revisions Log (Appendix 3) which is indicative of the key suggestions for changes in content, presentation or approach, made by consultees. A response to each suggestion made is highlighted to demonstrate that all comments have been considered where possible.

12. The following additions, revision themes or changes in emphasis are recommended, drawn from the recurring themes of the consultation responses. As presented below, these are indicative of broad areas, and not exhaustive of all the specific required revisions. In many cases, these themes are already picked up in the draft, but the consultation suggests they need emphasising and making more explicit:

- a. Growth and economy – Making clearer the City’s stated commitment and approach to sustainable economic development in the document, acknowledging that tensions exist. It should be made clear that this economic strategy does not seek growth as a means to an end. Yet, growth is already happening within local businesses and organisations, small or large, new or old. The central challenge of sustainable economic development is meeting the needs of Oxford’s residents without breaching environmental limits, whilst fulfilling the city’s important role.
- b. Inequality, opportunity, tackling deprivation – Share the many good examples of ways Oxford City Council and numerous partners are addressing the challenges of inequality, deprivation and opportunity gaps through targeted work in the areas of the city to those groups and sectors that need it most.
- c. Employment and Skills – Add examples of how Oxford City Council and partners are already supporting those facing barriers to the labour market and those sectors facing skills shortages as a result of the pandemic.
- d. Climate change – Whilst it is stated, make explicit the Council’s commitment to and approach to addressing decarbonisation and the climate emergency, bio-diversity, resilience to flooding in the city, building on the commitments agreed by the ‘Oxford Citizens Assembly’ and the declaration of Climate Emergency.
- e. Transition to Zero Carbon - Strengthening examples of how Oxford City Council and partners can accelerate and amplify initiatives in this area, including pursuing circular economy initiatives where possible.
- f. Zero carbon movement and connectivity – Highlighting the key initiatives that City and County Councils, and transport providers are working to implement to address congestion, supporting more people to walk/cycle, make movement around the area easier including through better linkages to the wider city.
- g. Housing – Making explicit the challenges and need for provision of affordable housing and housing that meets the needs of a variety of groups, even if this will be delivered primarily through wider strategies. This will be added to the document’s Guiding Principles.
- h. Businesses and innovation – Stronger examples of how Oxford City Council and partners can support mixed use development, and also support for SMEs and independent businesses, cafes and restaurants as well as retail, in response to changing office/retail behaviours particularly in light of Covid.
- i. Commercial workspace/Lab - Seek balanced, sustainable workspace provision across both allocated and brownfield sites, meeting fast-growing demand in certain sectors such as life sciences and technology.

- j. Highlight Initiatives that the City Council and Partner operators are delivering to address affordable space requirements in response to the changing use in the city post-pandemic.
 - k. Delivery Plan - the next iteration should focus on priority actions that can clearly be delivered in the timeframe, by either the council or committed partners, ensuring the county-wide partnership dimension of many areas of delivery and policy is explicit.
 - l. The Delivery Plan will be revisited following agreement of the Strategy, to ensure it is properly resourced and prioritised in line with the findings.
 - m. Future engagement and diverse representation – More diverse representation should be sought on the Oxford Economic Growth Board. This means more inclusive representation and a range of perspectives on economy, environment, net zero and inclusion. Moreover, future project development opportunities should be scoped in conjunction with under-represented groups.
 - n. Messaging, design and format - Specific recommended revisions were made around design of the documents such as diagrams and maps to ensure clarity of meaning and more effective messaging. Ensure an executive summary and case studies are added to enhance clarity of messaging
13. Future engagement will be conducted with diverse stakeholders (business, partners and residents) as the Council develops any detailed plans on major new projects.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from this decision. However, as projects and initiatives are brought forward through the usual processes, the financial implications of these will need to be considered on a case by case basis.

Legal issues

14. There are no legal implications arising from this decision.

Level of risk

15. The completed risk register is attached at Appendix 4. A number of risks will need to be managed including potential economic downturn, social changes post pandemic, ability to resource new actions, officer capacity, ensuring strong partnership working, and ensuring long-term alignment between economic and environmental aims in decision making. Mitigations have been put forward for each.

Equalities impact

16. The EQIA is attached at Appendix 5, noting that there are a number of potential positive impacts on equalities being sought through delivery of the OES. These impacts will be monitored on an annual basis.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

17. The Environmental Sustainability Service has been closely involved in development of the OES, which has a commitment to transitioning to Net Zero as one of the three key pillars of the strategy. The OES is aligned with the city's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency. In 2019, Oxford was the first UK city to hold a Citizens

Assembly on Climate Change. This representative sample of Oxford’s residents concluded that Oxford should decarbonise faster than national targets. The City Council has a target to achieve Net Zero across its own operations by 2030.

18. In 2021, the Council brought together Oxford’s major businesses and organisations – including the universities, teaching hospitals, local authorities, BMW Mini, Unipart, SSEN, housebuilders and others - to create the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP). Working with the Carbon Trust, ZCOP has developed and adopted a ‘Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan’, which seeks to achieve Net Zero by 2040 through collaborative working. This informs the OES, which also has a clear aim to support SMEs to decarbonise in tandem.
19. Air pollution is a major issue, particularly in the city centre, alongside traffic, flood risk and biodiversity emergency across Oxford. This will become worse without concerted action given the scale of development and change planned. The city has the opportunity to respond to these vital issues, by meeting the zero carbon by 2040 challenge. Oxford can also harness the knowledge and research developed in the city to make the low carbon response part of Oxford's economic diversification.

Concluding Comment

20. Considerable time has been taken to prepare Oxford’s Economic Strategy, taking into account the need to reflect on major socio-economic shifts, resulting from Pandemic. This has been followed by a 2 month period of consultation, with the findings of this now reflected in the revised OES (Appendix 1). Given the level of response and interest and the need to move forward towards a sustainable and inclusive recovery, it is recommended that the Cabinet recommend to Council that the OES be adopted and published adopt the OES and that available officer and partner resource is now focussed on delivering aims and objectives alongside our partners, and Oxford’s communities.

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Background Papers: None