

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 June 2022
Report of: Head of Planning Services
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan Local Development Scheme 2022-27

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present for approval the updated programme for the preparation of documents which will form the Council's Development 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:	Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036
Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1. Approve the Oxford Local Development Scheme 2022-27	
Appendices	
Appendix 1	Local Development Scheme 2022-27
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 2021-26. 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 2022-27 will come into effect from the date of approval by Cabinet and will supersede the existing LDS 2021-26.
4. The work programme focuses primarily on actions relating to 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 and Osney Mead Supplementary Planning Document to support the significant growth identified for this area in the Local Plan 2036.
5. This update to the LDS is required because of some changes to the work programmes since the 2021-2026 LDS. This includes to the West End and Osney Mead SPD, the Oxfordshire Plan and resultantly to the Oxford Local Plan 2040.
6. A Regulation 18 Part 1 consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was undertaken in June 2019 and a Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation was undertaken in 2021. Further work on the Oxfordshire Plan will be undertaken during the LDS period. The Department of Levelling-up and Communities has agreed that the timetable be amended again, but the details of the amendment to the timetable are not yet agreed. Therefore, the Oxfordshire Plan timetable is not shown in this version of the LDS, but will need to be added back into future versions.
7. The original programme for the Oxford Local Plan 2040 was designed to fit with the Oxfordshire Plan, in particular so it could feed from some of the joint evidence relating to the Oxfordshire Plan. The delay to the Oxfordshire Plan has included delays to the gathering of evidence and specialist, technical and strategic background work. This has affected the production of the Oxford Local Plan 2040. A small revision is therefore proposed to the timetable, such that instead of consulting on the Regulation 18 Preferred Options in June/July this year, the consultation is proposed to begin in October. Next year, the Regulation 19 consultation on the draft plan is pushed back by a few months also. This timetable means there is less time to move from the preferred options to the draft document, but it is essential to ensure the preferred options can reflect the joint evidence base.
8. The timetable for the West End and Osney Mead SPD has also been extended. Instead of consultation on the draft document in February/March this year consultation on the draft is due to take place in June.

Oxford Station SPD

9. The Station is an important gateway to the city and redevelopment of it and Becket Street Car Park has the potential to transform this area of the West End and to create a better gateway to the city. The previous LDS included a schedule for producing an Oxford Station Masterplan SPD. Early work on this has developed key principles and these are reflected in the West End and Osney Mead SPD. All work on the station must be in collaboration with Network Rail. It is likely that further work will continue to develop a masterplan. This may still be developed as an SPD, in which case the timetable is likely to be shown on a future version of the LDS; however, for now this project is not shown on the LDS.

Development Plan documents

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. A Regulation 18 Part 1 consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was undertaken in June 2019 and a Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation was undertaken in 2021. The previous LDS showed that a Regulation 19 consultation on the draft plan was scheduled to take place February-March 2022. This did not take place. The Department for Levelling Up and Communities has approved an amended timetable, and once the details of this are agreed the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will need to be included in an updated LDS. For now, no timetable can be included in this LDS because none is yet agreed.

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

Oxford Local Plan 2020-2040

14. The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 was adopted on 8th June 2020; therefore it contains policies based on recent evidence and is compliant with current guidance. However, government guidance requires that adopted Plans do not become more than 5 years old. That means a new plan must be adopted before June 2025. Given that a Local Plan takes considerable time to produce, the review was started a relatively short time after the adoption of the Local Plan 2036. 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 has led to 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.’

15. 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 informing the drafting 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 reactive. 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.
16. 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 2022-27 is therefore proposing the following timetable for production of the Oxford Local Plan 2040:

Local Plan stage	Programme LDS 2022-27
Issues and Scope/Options Consultation	Took place in June/July 2021
Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18)	Was scheduled June/July 2022- amended to October/November 2022

Proposed Submission Consultation (Regulation 19)	Was scheduled June/July 2023-amended to August September 2023
Submission (Regulation 22)	December 2023
Inspector's Report	January 2025
Adoption (Regulation 26)	March 2025

17. 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.
18. The timetable after the plan has been submitted for examination is not within the City Council's control. The timescales assumed from submission to adoption broadly reflect those experienced with the Oxford Local Plan 2036.

Neighbourhood Plans

19. Three neighbourhood plans are made and one further neighbourhood area has been designated and work has begun on producing a neighbourhood plan for Littlemore.

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. The Statement of Community Involvement requires two key consultations to be undertaken on an SPD. The first consultation on the issues and scope took place in March 2021. This included 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 scheduled to be in June 2022 (delayed from Feb/March 2022).

Annual Authority Monitoring Report

27. Each year the City Council produces an Authority Monitoring Report. This will be taken for Cabinet approval in November 2022 for publication in December 2022. The Authority Monitoring report published in December 2022 will be reporting on the monitoring year 2021/22.
28. The Authority 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

29. The timetable of the Local Development Scheme has been structured to enable key work to progress whilst minimising financial implications.
30. The work in the 2021/22 financial year was 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, collecting an evidence base for the 2040 Local Plan and early engagement on issues around the next Local Plan including reviewing the Statement of Community Involvement.
31. A key cost in the 22/23 financial year and beyond is the Local Plan 2040. 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. 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 periodically throughout the preparation of the plan) 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.
32. 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 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 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.
33. 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 to manage growth within Oxford.

Legal issues

34. 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).
35. 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 Authority Monitoring Report.

Level of risk

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

Equalities impact

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

Environmental Impact Assessment

38. Because this document is setting out a timetable and work programme it does not itself have any environmental impacts.

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Background Papers: None