

To: Cabinet
Date: 14 September 2022
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation Document

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 06 September 2022 to consider a report on the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation Document. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 14 September 2022, recommends that Cabinet approves the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options document for public consultation; and authorises the Planning Policy and Place Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, to make any necessary editorial corrections to the documents and the supporting evidence base prior to going out to consultation.

Summary and recommendations

2. Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, introduced the report. He reminded the Committee that a Local Plan was not intended to be an overarching plan for the Council but a specific example of strategic level planning.
3. Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager, and Amanda Ford, Team Leader – Planning Policy, summarised the extent to which the team was exploring ways to consult and reported that around 4,000 responses were received to the previous consultation on the Local Plan 2036. They explained that they hoped that even greater engagement would be achieved in relation to this consultation.
4. The Committee recognised the intention to consult widely in different formats as detailed in the Consultation and Engagement Plan at Appendix 2. However, the Committee was conscious that such a large document would be, to most people, difficult to navigate. Whilst a contents page of policy option sets existed, the Committee suggested that consideration should be given to a key to the document and, where it existed digitally, this should ensure ease of navigation.

Recommendation 1: That the Council inserts a key to the document to ensure that navigation and integration are more accessible.

5. The Committee noted the intention to make the consultation accessible to all of Oxford's residents and suggested that particular consideration should be given to ensuring those for whom English was a second or other language could engage with the process.

Recommendation 2: That the Council gives consideration to how to engage most effectively with residents for whom English is a second or other language during the consultation process, including the provision of drop-in sessions.

6. The Committee noted the intention to engage residents using social media, events, and various print and online publications. In order to increase accessibility and to encourage engagement, the Committee suggested that consideration should be given to producing audio summaries in the form of basic podcasts.

Recommendation 3: That the Council explores options to produce basic podcasts summarising the document.

7. The Committee recognised that the Local Plan would affect all those who visit or spend time in Oxford and not just those who live in the City. This was particularly the case for those who work in Oxford but do not live there, whether for reasons of affordability or otherwise. The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to consulting representative groups of those who work in the City, through trade unions and the royal colleges, so as to ensure their views were received.

Recommendation 4: That the Council seeks to engage specifically with vocational groups (such as trade unions and royal colleges) to ensure that the voice of those who work in Oxford but do not live in the City is heard.

8. The Committee recognised that the Local Plan would affect those who live in the City but are either vulnerably housed or sleeping rough. The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to consulting charities and organisations which support and represent people in those situations to ensure their views were received.

Recommendation 5: That the Council seeks to engage specifically with organisations representing those with specific housing needs, such as Crisis and Acorn.

9. The Committee noted that reference was made to a key principle being to “ensure good connectivity by foot and cycle and public transport across the area” and suggested that consideration should be given to clarifying what was meant by this. The Committee noted that there was limited reference to car free spaces and, whilst recognising that these were implicit given the National Model Design Code principles, suggested consideration should be given to explaining this in the document.

Recommendation 6: That the Council clarifies the definition of ‘good connectivity’ within the document.

Recommendation 7: That the Council explains in the document that the National Model Design Code principles are applied when considering the location of car parking in relation to residential and shared amenity spaces.

10. The Committee noted that sections 8.6 and 8.7 of the document set out a distinction between ‘site allocations’ and ‘areas of focus’. In order to enable greater engagement with the proposals set out in the document, the Committee suggested that consideration be given to explaining more fully the distinction between the two and the interaction between them.

Recommendation 8: That the Council explains the distinction between ‘areas of focus’ and ‘site allocation policies’ and the interaction between them within the document.

11. The Committee heard the Cabinet Member’s explanation of the challenges of including certain measures and intentions in terms of development principles because they were governed by other processes or included in other documents. Nonetheless, the Committee considered that a number of issues would benefit from explicit reference in the document. Where that was either forbidden by legislation, or was covered by a separate document, the Committee suggested that

consideration should be given to explaining that in the introduction to the Local Plan document.

Recommendation 9: That the Council makes explicit reference to the importance of access to nature in housing developments within the document.

Recommendation 10: That the Council makes explicit reference to the importance of street trees within the document.

Recommendation 11: That the Council ensures in cases where explicit reference to a topic or area of policy is forbidden by legislation, or that topic or area of policy is covered in a separate document, that this is explained in the document introduction.

12. The Committee noted that figure S3 of the document showed how the policy option sets sought to address the issue of climate change and that the narrative text described how the Council sought to do that. The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to citing international agreements such as the Paris Agreement and that the language of such agreements, such as 'loss and damage' should be reflected in the narrative section.

Recommendation 12: That the Council makes explicit reference to the Paris Agreement within the document and that the language of international frameworks, such as 'loss and damage', be reflected in the narrative section.

Report author	Richard Doney
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	07485 311341
e-mail	rdoney@oxford.gov.uk