

To: Cabinet
Date: 18 October 2023
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 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 Lucy Pegg, Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24; Development Plan Document
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 members of the Scrutiny Committee held an extraordinary informal remote meeting on 16 October 2023 to consider the Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 18 October 2023, recommends that Cabinet approves the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Proposed Submission Document for consultation; approves the statutory supporting information (Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulation Assessment, Infrastructure Development Plan, Equalities Impact Assessment); and authorises the Head of Planning Services to make minor changes as detailed in the Cabinet report, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Upton (Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities), David Butler (Head of Planning and Regulatory

Services), Rachel Williams (Planning Policy and Place Manager) and Sarah Harrison (Team Leader (Planning Policy)) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

3. The Committee also had two external contributions at the meeting and would like to thank Kaddy Beck for attending to address the Committee and the Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) for submitting a representation.

Summary and recommendations

4. Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities introduced the report. The Local Plan was an important document which set the context within which Oxford was going to develop over the next 15 years. It would be the document used by the Council when determining planning applications, including consideration of where homes would be built; where jobs would be located; the protection of blue and green spaces; and the protection of district centres to ensure they remained vibrant and thriving. The Local Plan was a lengthy and complex document which had been in development for a very long period of time; and sought to balance factors such as the delivery of affordable housing, net zero, employment and protecting heritage and conservation areas – while still ensuring that buildings were viable.
5. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to site allocation; local and district centres; provision of healthcare infrastructure; pressures on services from other developments outside of the City boundary; collaboration and partnership working during the Plan making process (both in Oxford and neighbouring Districts); viability policies; affordable workspace; First Homes; parking standards; development density; and information contained in the Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2 to the report).
6. In particular, the Committee discussed the need for the provision of adequate healthcare infrastructure within the City, both to address new demand as a result of new development within *and* outside the City boundary and existing unmet need. Officers advised that the Council did engage with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) as part of the Plan making process, as was also the requirement for the surrounding Districts, wherein the Council informed the ICB of the Council's plans, including planned growth, and the ICB then considered what plans it needed to put in place to address need. The Committee was of the view that engagement with healthcare partners could be improved to ensure a mutual understanding of development plans, planned growth and what healthcare infrastructure provision was required as a result, to include wider cross-boundary collaboration between the ICB and all neighbouring Districts so that healthcare demand could be considered in the round.

Recommendation 1: That the Council seeks to facilitate increased engagement with the Integrated Care Board in relation to the provision of healthcare infrastructure to meet both new and existing unmet demand as a result of development within and outside the City boundary, to ensure that adequate plans are drawn up to meet existing and future demand, in collaboration with the neighbouring Districts to encourage good joined-up, cross-boundary working.

7. The Committee noted the inclusion of a policy within the draft Local Plan relating to affordable workspace (Policy E3) and queried why a lower target requirement for the provision of affordable workspace by developers was not included. The Committee was advised that this particular policy was ground-breaking and no other local authority was doing it; the policy had been tested in the preferred options consultation and viability work had shown that it was viable for developers to contribute towards affordable workspace, but because this was a new policy there was a limited evidence base at present. Eight sites had been identified within the draft Local Plan which would be expected to deliver affordable workspace as part of their masterplans and it was anticipated that the Council would work collaboratively with those sites to deliver on the policy and then build upon the policy in future Local Plans by hopefully being able to include concrete proposals and numerical targets once the evidence base had grown. Cllr Upton and officers were of the view that the Council had gone as far as it possibly could with this policy in the current context but were hopeful that the policy could be strengthened in future iterations of the Local Plan.
8. While the Committee broadly accepted the rationale provided for not including specific targets within Policy E3 at the current time, it agreed that the policy could be strengthened by requiring developers to justify why they could not provide affordable workspace, in the event that their affordable workspace strategy did not propose the provision of any affordable workspace.

Recommendation 2: That the Council adds a requirement into Policy E3: Affordable Workspace Strategy and Affordable Workspace Provision on Commercial Sites that, in the event that a developer of any of the 8 sites listed does not propose the provision of affordable workspace within their affordable workspace strategy, that developer must include a justification within their strategy as to why not.

9. The Committee discussed the definitions of District Centres and Local Centres within the draft Local Plan, with a particular focus on what constituted a Local Centre. Members made reference to a number of locations across the City which were not currently defined as Local Centres and how, when cross-referenced with other locations which were included on the list of Local Centres within the document, it was not clear why those areas had not been included in the list of Local Centres in addition. The Committee queried how the list of Local Centres was determined relative to the definition and was informed that it was a difficult judgement call and there was often a very fine line between whether a location was defined as a Local Centre or not; many Local Centres had been defined as such for a very long time and carried forward from one Local Plan to the next, though the list of Local Centres was reviewed during the development of the draft Local Plan and consideration given to defining areas as Local Centres which were not already served by other District or Local Centres.
10. The Committee noted that a new Local Centre had been defined in Marston, however believed that there would be value in reassessing the list of Local Centres and locations not included in the list against the definition to see whether more locations could be included. In the event that this recommendation was not accepted for the current draft Local Plan, the Committee recommended that the definition of a Local Centre within the document be made clearer to aid understanding as to why some areas were not defined as such.

Recommendation 3: That the Council reassesses the list of Local Centres and locations not included in the list against the definition to see whether more locations can be included in this and future Local Plans.

Recommendation 4: That the Council clarifies the definition of a Local Centre within the draft Local Plan to aid understanding as to why some areas are not defined as such, in the event that recommendation 3 is not accepted for the current draft Local Plan.

11. During discussion relating to site allocation and density of developments, the Committee queried policies SPS16 (Crescent Hall) and SPS11 (Cowley Marsh Depot). In relation to Policy SPS16, the Committee noted that the draft Local Plan stated the site was currently described as having capacity of approximately 300 bedspaces, but the policy stated the minimum number of dwellings to be delivered on the site was 29, which was a significant reduction on the current capacity. In relation to Policy SPS11, the Committee noted that the draft Local Plan stated the site was suitable for residential development of similar density to the surrounding residential area, however further highlighted that the area was quite low density and queried the appropriateness of opting for more dwellings at that low density. Officers advised that the minimum number of dwellings stated was a minimum *in addition* to any dwellings already on the site and that the density around the Cowley Marsh Depot site was reasonably high for a suburban area.
12. The Committee was informed that the Council had to make very cautious assumptions in terms of number of dwellings as the Local Plan had to be fully deliverable. Developers were encouraged to come forward with appropriate plans to deliver more dwellings than stated in the policy, but there was a requirement for the minimum number of new homes stated in the document to be delivered, therefore there was a need for the Council to be comfortable that it had not been too ambitious with the minimum numbers. The Committee agreed that it was not clear in the draft Local Plan that minimum numbers of dwellings to be delivered were in addition to any dwellings currently on sites and that this would benefit from clarification.

Recommendation 5: That the Council clarifies the way in which housing numbers on sites are presented within the draft Local Plan, to make clear that the minimum number of dwellings to be delivered which are stated within policies are in addition to the number of existing dwellings on those sites.

13. In further discussion on development sites, the Committee considered Policy SPS12 (Templars Square) and the level of importance of this site in terms of a regeneration project which would benefit the whole southeast of the City. The Committee noted the cautious wording within the document, including relating to the impact of any development at the site on views from the historic and central cores of the City, and was concerned about how this caution might be balanced with achieving the full potential of the Templars Square site. The Committee agreed that the Council had an important role to play in ensuring the site was reinvigorated and it would therefore be beneficial for the narrative and Policy SPS12 around Templars Square

to be amended so that it highlighted the importance of its redevelopment to a wide area of the City.

Recommendation 6: That the Council amends the narrative around Templars Square and related Policy SPS12 to highlight the current significance and significant future potential of the site, more broadly than just the provision of housing, to a large number of people and communities across a large area of the City beyond Cowley alone – stressing the importance of redevelopment and reinvigoration of the site.

14. The Committee held a brief discussion around the ward names used in the draft Local Plan and noted that there were some instances where ward names had changed since the previous iteration of the Local Plan, but had not been updated in the current draft (e.g. references to Iffley Fields, which was now Rose Hill & Iffley). The Committee agreed that references to wards should be reviewed to ensure the ward names within the document correctly reflected the current wards.

Recommendation 7: That the Council reviews the ward names used within the draft Local Plan to ensure that they correctly reflect the current wards of the City.

15. The Committee touched on accessibility and agreed that, owing to the document's length and density, it was difficult to easily identify what had changed compared to the Local Plan 2036. The Committee agreed that, at the point at which the Local Plan 2040 was published, it would be helpful to include a list of changes between the Local Plan 2036 and Local Plan 2040 for public consumption to aid accessibility, understanding and general interaction with the document.

Recommendation 8: That the Council produces a list of changes between the Local Plan 2036 and Local Plan 2040 to publish alongside the Local Plan 2040 for public consumption.

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