

To: Cabinet
Date: 9th April 2025
Report of: Director of Planning and Regulation
Title of Report: Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To endorse the examination of Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning & Cycling Champion
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	A pleasant place to live, delivering housing with a mixed and balanced community; Providing communities with facilities and services and ensuring Oxford is a vibrant and enjoyable city to live in and visit.
Recommendation(s): that Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Proceed with the neighbourhood plan process by submitting the consultation responses and the draft plan for independent examination
2	Delegate to Director of Planning & Regulation to proceed to referendum following receipt of the examiners report, including any modifications or amendments the Examiner recommends
Appendices	
Appendix 1	Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan Submission Draft with area map
Appendix 2	Annexes to Submission Draft to Draft Plan
Appendix 3	Basic conditions statement
Appendix 4a	Consultation Statement
Appendix 4b	Pre-submission OCC response

Appendix 4c	Proposed submission draft amendments
Appendix 4d	Responses to Reg 16 representations
Appendix 5	SEA Screening Statement
Appendix 6	Risk Assessment
Appendix 7	Equalities Impact Assessment

1. The Localism Act 2011 introduced new rights and powers to enable communities to get directly involved in planning for their areas. Neighbourhood planning allows interested communities to come together through a Neighbourhood Forum to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. Once a Neighbourhood Plan is 'made' it will become part of the statutory development plan, and therefore is an important material consideration to be used when making decisions on planning applications.
2. Regulations set out the requirements for the process prior to submission of a neighbourhood plan and once a neighbourhood plan is submitted. The City Council has been consulted on this Plan prior to its submission and has provided advice and guidance on the process through an on-going dialogue including meetings and email correspondence which has resulted in amendments and improvements to policies in the plan.
3. The draft Neighbourhood Plan was submitted on behalf of Littlemore Parish Council on 5th October 2024. The content of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan has been developed under the direction of a Working Group appointed by the Parish Council. The Plan area was formally designated as a Neighbourhood Area on 15th August 2017, and comprises of the entire area within the Littlemore Parish boundaries. A map of the area is included in the submission draft document (see Appendix 1).

Legal compliance

4. On receipt of a draft Neighbourhood Plan the City Council must consider whether the body that submitted it is authorised to do so. Officers consider that there is no breach of relevant Regulations.
5. The Council is required to consider whether the regulations made concerning neighbourhood planning have been complied with. The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require that certain documents must be included when a Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted. These documents are:
 - a map or statement which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates;
 - a consultation statement – which contains details of those consulted, how they were consulted, summarises the main issues and concerns raised and how these have been considered, and where relevant addressed in the proposed neighbourhood plan;
 - the proposed neighbourhood development plan;
 - a statement explaining how the proposed neighbourhood development plan meets the 'basic conditions', i.e. requirements of paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act;

- a statement of reasons for determination that the proposal is unlikely to have significant environmental effects under regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; and
 - a Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening statement.
6. The submission materials provided are attached in Appendix 2 and a map of the area is provided at Appendix 1. Officers are of the view that the submission materials meet those regulatory requirements.

Consultation Stages

Regulation 14 Consultation stage

7. In accordance with Regulation 14, a consultation on a pre-submission draft of the plan was carried out by the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG) acting at the direction of the parish council. At this stage the city council does not have a statutory function, although officers were able to confirm that the requirements relating to the information required and the level of publicity were complied with. Officers also continued to make themselves available for technical support and guidance if it was required.
8. The Reg 14 consultation stage lasted for 6 weeks between 7th May to 18th June 2024, with some added time to allow for late responses. A total of 39 representations were received from residents and other local stakeholders, alongside representations from statutory bodies. At this stage the City council provided a series of comments, comprising of observations on specific policies and the overall plan with the aim of improving its prospects at the examination stage.
9. The NPWG has produced a consultation statement which outlines the details of the various consultation stages to date, including the statutory stages and previous engagement efforts leading up to the pre-submission draft (see Appendix 4a).

Regulation 16 Consultation Stage

10. Following the submission of the Neighbourhood Plan, the City Council carried out a consultation in compliance with Reg 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations which require local planning authorities to publicise the plan proposal. The Neighbourhood Planning Working Group had no specific action at this point other than ensuring the correct information was made available for publicity. This consultation was for 6 weeks, between 28 October to 9 December 2024. A total of 21 representations were received from residents and other local stakeholders, alongside statutory bodies and commercial entities with interests in the area.
11. The results were shared with the NPWG, who have reviewed the comments and prepared a schedule of responses and proposed modifications to the submitted plan for consideration at examination (see Appendix 4c).
12. Officers can recommend that submission has 'satisfied' the requirements of the Regulations. The Plan was publicised in accordance with the Regulations. The Regulations state that if the Council is satisfied that these requirements have been complied with, it must notify Littlemore Parish Council and make arrangements for an independent examination of the draft Plan.

Summary of the contents of the Plan

13. The broad aims of the proposals in the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan seek to benefit all those who live and work in the ward and are for all age groups and future generations in the area. The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan aims to respect and reflect the views of its community and be a means for residents to influence how Littlemore develops in the future. The overall vision comprises of meeting the economic, social, and environmental requirements for an outstanding quality of life that will benefit current and future generations of residents, visitors and working people. The proposed plan period is between 2025 and 2040.

14. The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan contains policies covering the following topic areas and their related objectives:

a) Built Environment:

- Ensuring Littlemore remains an attractive, healthy place to live, work and visit, with consideration given to the importance of its history and buildings of architectural interest.
- Ensuring that new developments are of quality design and built to ambitious sustainability standards.

15. Protecting and enhancing landscape views and skylines.

- Achieving a balance of housing suitable for single residents, older people, and both small and large families in relation to changing demographics.
- Encouraging accessibility to affordable housing with access for people on low incomes, key workers and families with strong local connections.
- Supporting the continuing development of businesses and local enterprises that will provide employment opportunities for local residents.

b) Community assets and infrastructure:

- Protecting and enhancing community, leisure and sports facilities.
- Improving the provision of facilities, especially local primary health care and utilities.
- Encouraging greater diversity of easily accessible shops and eating places.

c) Natural Environment

- Protecting and enhancing public open spaces.
- Ensuring suitable provision of green space within new developments.
- Conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
- Minimising air and noise pollution from new and existing structures and developments.
- Encouraging use of new technologies to provide low/zero carbon solutions.

d) Transport and Connectivity

- Reviewing and addressing the problems of parking and increased volume of traffic, congestion, and journey times, taking consideration of the needs of residents, pedestrians, cyclists, and users of motorised transport.

- Improving access to different areas within and beyond Littlemore with well-maintained footpaths, cycleways, and facilities for disabled people. Improve connectivity to places outside Littlemore, notably Cowley Centre.
- Improving public transport, particularly for areas which are poorly served, while ensuring necessary car journeys can be completed quickly and easily.
- Ensuring that difficulties of traffic congestion, parking and road safety are addressed.

e) Health and Well-Being

- Improving the physical and mental health and well-being of residents, especially those who are most disadvantaged
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles.
- Reducing the health inequalities both between Littlemore and elsewhere in Oxford City, and within Littlemore.
- Maintaining and expanding facilities for leisure, exercise and relaxation.
- Prioritising projects that enhance community cohesion, particularly those that promote healthy living and reduce loneliness and anxiety.
- Advocating for improved primary health care facilities accessible to all parts of Littlemore.
- Helping to make Littlemore a safer and healthier place for residents, especially by enhancing a greater sense of safety and discouraging antisocial behaviour.

16. No new sites for development have been proposed. The scope of the policies and topic areas covered are at a scale that is broadly appropriate for a development plan of this type.

Linkages between the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan

17. Once 'made', the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory development plan framework. As such it will be considered alongside the all the adopted plans that make up the Development Plan. The National Planning Policy Framework provides that it is the most recent development plan document that takes precedence. Therefore, once made, the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will take precedence over the existing Local Plan if there is a non-strategic policy conflict.

18. In terms of its objectives the Neighbourhood Plan is broadly aligned with the current 2036 Local Plan. There were also no significant conflicts in approach that were identified with the now withdrawn Oxford Local Plan 2040, and it is expected that this will continue to be the case with the emerging Local Plan 2042 as there is no major deviation as far as it concerns the areas of interest for the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan.

19. However once adopted, the emerging Oxford Local Plan 2042 will take precedence over the neighbourhood plan policies if any differences arise between them.

20. The Local Plan 2042 timetable, as noted in the Local Development Scheme, suggests submission of the Plan in April 2026 with the estimated publication date of the Inspectors' report by late 2026. If these timings are adhered to, the likely adoption of the Local Plan 2042 will be in Spring 2027. Following the receipt of the Inspector's Report for the Local Plan 2042, the weight given to the Local Plan policies would then be significant having been supported by the Inspector.
21. The neighbourhood plan timetable suggests that the neighbourhood plan would be 'made' (adopted) by no later than early 2026, assuming there is a referendum in favour. Following a successful referendum the neighbourhood plan policies would gain full material weight in planning decisions. There is the possibility therefore, that there would be a brief period when policies in the neighbourhood plan took precedence in the interim period until the adoption of the Local Plan 2042. However in terms of potential policy conflicts, these would likely to be minor and non-strategic in nature given the current content of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Examination Stage

22. The next stage of the process is for an independent examiner to be appointed by the city Council. The role of the examiner is to test whether the plan meets the basic conditions and other relevant legal requirements set out above. They are not testing the soundness of the plan or looking at other material considerations.
23. It is generally expected that neighbourhood plan examinations will be held without a public hearing i.e. by way of written representations. However, the examiner may decide to call a public hearing to examine a key issue in more depth and/or ensure a person has a fair chance to put a case. If there is a public hearing, the examiner will decide things like how questions are to be posed to others and the time allowed for questioning.
24. After the examination the examiner will submit a report to the city council. The report will set out whether the draft plan meets the basic conditions and what modifications (if any) are needed to ensure it does. The possible recommendations are:
- the plan proceeds to referendum in the form submitted;
 - the plan is modified by us to meet basic conditions and then the modified plan proceeds to referendum; or
 - the plan/ does not proceed to referendum
25. Enquiries have been made with potential examiners and a formal appointment shall be made shortly after Cabinet endorsement has been received to proceed.

Environmental Considerations

26. A combined Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Statement, has been submitted as part of the supporting evidence. The SEA / HRA Screening Opinion was previously sent to the Statutory Consultees, including the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic

England (see Appendix 5). As no site allocations have been proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered that an SEA is not required.

27. The statutory bodies concurred with the conclusion that an SEA was not required. Their detailed comments are included in the consultation statement in appendix 4a.

Financial Implications

28. The City Council must consult on the draft Plan, organise an examination and run the referendum. These requirements will be met from the current resources of the Planning Policy Team supplemented as required by grants available from central government to district councils for each neighbourhood plan.
29. When a neighbourhood plan has been made, the local community will be entitled to an increase in the Neighbourhood Proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts that are to be spent in the locality with community input. This will rise from 15% of CIL receipts to 25% of CIL receipts. The City Council will retain all the CIL monies but engage with the communities where the development has taken place and agree with them how best to spend the neighbourhood funding element. At the point the Neighbourhood Plan is 'made' the element of Neighbourhood Portion of CIL which is allocated to Ward Members in this NP area will cease at the end of the financial year.
30. In relation to the referendum, the current estimation for its cost is between £11,000 to £17000.

Legal Issues

31. Officers consider that the information submitted by the Parish council, and the consultation process to date has been sufficient for the City Council to be "satisfied" and that the other statutory requirements are met so that the draft Plan can be submitted for independent examination.

Level of risk

32. The Risk Register is attached at Appendix 4. There are several risks associated with undertaking this timetable, as follows:
33. The timetable assumes an Examination that is undertaken by written representations and take up to 8 weeks. These timings are estimates derived from initial enquiries with independent examiners, as well as previous experience from the examination of previous Neighbourhood Plans within Oxford. It should be noted that the City Council has no control over this element of the timetable.
34. If the examiner decides that the Neighbourhood Plan should take place via hearing sessions, this length of time could be significantly longer. Whilst the majority of Neighbourhood Plans are undertaken by written representations it is however necessary to highlight this as a potential risk to the timetable.
35. Other risks to the timetable include the period identified for the City Council to agree any modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan with the Neighbourhood Forum in response to the Inspector's Report.

36. There is the always a potential risk of a High Court challenge which would delay the project timetable while the legal challenge is being processed and, depending on the outcome of the legal challenge, could result in the plan being quashed if it is successful.

Equalities Impact

37. Consideration has been given to the public sector equality duty imposed by s149 of the Equality Act 2010. Having paid due regard to the need to meet the objectives of that duty the view is taken that the duty has been met. The consultation meets the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement for Planning, which has undergone its own Equalities Impact Assessment.

Report author	Arome Agamah
Job title	Senior Planner
Service area or department	Planning and Regulatory Services
Telephone	x2360
e-mail	aagamah@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None
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