

Oxford City Council Comments on the Emerging Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan (Pre-submission Consultation Response)

June 2024

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the pre-submission draft of your neighbourhood plan. The City Council is supportive of efforts by planning forums to develop their own neighbourhood plans, as they complement and bring specificity at a local level to the strategic matters that are addressed within the local plan.

Neighbourhood Plans are community-led plans which must meet certain requirements set out in law, national planning policy, and national guidance. An independent examination will check if the plan meets the requirements when it has been prepared by the community. In addition, the City Council has a general 'duty to support' communities in the preparation of neighbourhood plans although councils do not prepare them.

We are happy to assist where possible with technical aspects of the evidence base, sense checking the content of policies or pointing towards information sources as needed. The aim is to assist you in preparing a plan that meets the necessary legal requirements including the relevant 'basic conditions' as set out in national policy and guidance. The council also has a formal role in adopting neighbourhood plans, where recommendations of the independent inspector support that.

General Comments

The policies in the neighbourhood plan relate to the built environment, natural environment, transport and connectivity, and health and wellbeing. The scope of the policies and topic areas covered are at a scale that is broadly aligned to being appropriate for a development plan of this type.

In terms of its objectives the Neighbourhood Plan is broadly aligned with the current and emerging Oxford local plans, and there are thus far no significant conflicts identified with the approach followed in both plans. It is recommended that this alignment is maintained to assist in ensuring the neighbourhood plan does not become out of date quickly.

It is noted that no development site allocations (additional to what is already contained in the Local Plan) are proposed. Therefore, the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is unlikely. A separate screening assessment is being prepared and consultation with the relevant statutory bodies carried out.

Timetable

One of the basic conditions is a requirement that the Neighbourhood Plan should be in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan.

The Local Plan 2036 (OLP 2036) is the current adopted development plan for Oxford. The Local Plan 2040 (OLP 2040) is likely to be adopted in spring/early summer 2025 in accordance with the [Local Development Scheme](#) (timetable).

Should the Neighbourhood Plan proceed to examination prior to the adoption of the Local Plan 2040 it will be examined against the Local Plan 2036 and its policies.

Policy Comments

Having carried out a review of the NP policies, we have some observations on specific policies that the forum may wish to consider while refining the policies ahead of formal submission. The comments will assist in the neighbourhood plan being successfully examined by an independent person and consequently adopted by the council. More evidence/assessment is very likely to be required in order to demonstrate certain aspects of the proposals are appropriate.

NP Policy	OCC Comments
BES1 Sheltered and supported housing	The Local Plan supports the provision of sheltered and older persons accommodation (policy H11 in OLP 2036 and policy H13 in OLP 2040), although no specific additional need has been identified overall (see Infrastructure Delivery Plan). Provision is assessed on a city-wide basis, rather than by neighbourhood.
BES4 Resisting large HMOs and avoiding family houses becoming short-term letting properties	The Local Plan contains policies that seek to regulate the expansion of HMOs and prevent avoidable losses of family sized housing, which are compatible with the objectives of this policy. The evidence base for the Local Plan policy considers the city as a whole and does not include neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood approaches. BES4's provision for counting large HMO's with 7+ bedrooms as two dwellings does not align with H8 or any other policy in OLP 2036, OLP2040 and national policy – definitions for what constitute residential dwellings and HMOs are very specific and set by central government, so they cannot be reinterpreted.
BES5 Enhancing historic buildings	It may be better to refer to the significance of heritage assets and their settings - this will ensure that the policy encompasses heritage assets that may not necessarily be buildings, and also to make clear that the setting is often as much a part of the positive contribution created by the heritage assets themselves. The Littlemore Conservation Area Appraisal may also be a useful reference. Have any efforts been made to add any of the named assets onto the Oxford Heritage Asset Register (OHAR) ?

<p>BES6 Encouraging energy efficiency retrofit</p>	<p>Retrofitting for energy efficiency can encompass a range of measures besides external visible installations. A good starting point will be the guidance produced by the city council on sustainable retrofit of historic buildings (TAN 15).</p>
<p>CIS1 Replacement of community facilities</p>	<p>There is alignment with the emerging objectives of OLP2040 policy C3 and with the objectives of policy V7 of OLP 2036. In the case of facilities that fall within allocated sites, the policy will need to be in general conformity with the provisions and requirements contained within the relevant site allocation policy – especially where equivalent, expanded or improved facilities are sought. Is there any evidence to demonstrate the buildings next to the Kassam stadium meet the definition and use class of a community facility?</p>
<p>CIS2 Improvement of existing community assets</p>	<p>There is alignment with the emerging objectives of emerging OLP2040 policy C3. However, it will benefit the plan for criteria/evidence for categorising a site as a community facility should be set out – as well as an indication of its conformity with the LPs definition of a community infrastructure. This is necessary to allow proposals to be clearly assessed against clearly defined criteria. Is there any locally sourced evidence that can support e.g. surveys of local residents on what community facilities are needed?</p>
<p>CIC3 Working with businesses and others to promote lifelong learning</p>	<p>There is alignment with emerging objectives OLP2040 policy E4, and with respect to the current Local Plan there is also policy Employment and Skills guidance (TAN 2) relating to Community Employment Plans published on our webpages. There is an opportunity to highlight specific settings and contexts that developers can positively contribute.</p>

<p>NES1 Protection of, and access to, green and blue spaces</p>	<p>This has the potential to be as much of a spatially focussed policy as an environmental policy.</p> <p>It may be useful to identify key characteristics that are considered to be locally important that can provide additional context for any development schemes to take into consideration at design stage, e.g. views, local amenity value, historic significance etc.</p> <p>It is important that designations are applied in a way which will ensure access to quality green spaces and not as a means of seeking to prevent development.</p>
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<p>NES2 Protection of wildlife habitats/biodiversity</p>	<p>A number of sites are identified under Policy NES2 as wildlife habitats, which are acknowledged in the text as being below the threshold for national designation.</p> <p>The NPPF has a baseline of protection for green spaces, which aligns with the level of protection bestowed in policy G1B or C in the emerging plan. This is particularly the case for very small sites such as verges, unless they meet the specific criteria for Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designation.</p> <p>Designating a site as an LWS in the Oxfordshire area is in the remit of the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). If there are any spaces that the plan seeks to have this formal designation it is recommended that their advice is sought. Ecological and biodiversity evidence will be required to demonstrate a site can be made a LWS and for any policy to be successfully adopted.</p> <p>The plan will benefit from including the rationale and/or categories for protection, criteria for selecting these sites, and the methodology for assessment. This can be included as an appendix even if it is not in the policy wording or supporting text. It should be aligned to that in the Local Plan, supported by local detail.</p> <p>The Biodiversity net gain minimum in this plan is 15% which exceeds the 10% that is required in the emerging OLP 2040. Developments achieving a higher BNG than the baseline is encouraged, however the baseline in the OLP 2040 has been arrived at by assessing local plan viability, as it affects development across the city and not at neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood level. The required minimum level should not be so high that it stops future development being viable – is there evidence for setting the higher minimum threshold of biodiversity net gain locally?</p>
<p>NES4 Protection of allotments</p>	<p>The current and emerging local plan include policies that resist the loss of allotments other than in exceptional circumstances. It may not be necessary to have a bespoke policy in the NP, unless this is rationalised with other green spaces policies. Allotments are also protected nationally, which usually requires replacements where they are lost.</p>

<p>NEC1 Protecting and enhancing local parks and green spaces</p>	<p>Provisions of this policy may already be included in other policies, particularly NES1 and NEC2 – policy could potentially be rationalised to minimise duplication/repetition.</p> <p>The plan will benefit from including the rationale and/or categories for protection, criteria for selecting these sites, and the methodology for assessment. This can be included as an appendix even if it is not in the policy wording or supporting text.</p> <p>Evidence the proposed areas to be designated meet the relevant criteria for designation will need to be provided. This should be in the form of an assessment and/or audit which is carried out for each area to be designated.</p> <p>In addition, maps and plans showing a red line site boundary to be designated will be required, which can sit in an appendix or alongside the policy.</p> <p>Please refer to this independent guidance for further assistance: Making local green space designations in your neighbourhood plan - Locality Neighbourhood Planning</p> <p>Identify opportunities for betterment or improvement that may result as part of development schemes or delivered as planning obligations.</p>
<p>NEC2 Provision of, and safe access to, green spaces</p>	<p>This is an area which specific opportunities for enhancement and improvement may be identified – and can be linked as benefiting from development, either directly or through planning obligations.</p>
<p>NEC4 Increasing biodiversity and wildlife</p>	<p>It should be noted what green features are suitable or relevant for specific protection. A designation will be required for protection from development/loss based on a rationale and methodology backed by evidence. A hierarchy of protection should also be considered to ensure consistency with national planning policy and guidance. Provisions of this policy may already be included in other policies, particularly NES2 – policy could potentially be rationalised to minimise duplication/repetition. What are the intentions for this policy and how does it differ from NES2, NEC1?</p>

<p>Policies TCS1, TCS2, TCC1, TCC3, TCC4, TCC6</p>	<p>These policies are written at a high level and aspirational, however they could benefit from rationalisation and focussing on criteria for assessing development proposals to ensure they are effectively used by the right stakeholders at the right time.</p> <p>They could be reframed to suggest criteria against which development proposals should be assessed items they will need to deliver, clarifying possible community actions that support new traffic/highways measures and to suggest the potential for planning obligations that development could contribute towards.</p>
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Conclusion

In conclusion, it is suggested that additional evidence is prepared to address the relevant comments above.

The proposed policies should be framed in such a way that they refer to development or specific types of development proposals, with clear criteria for how the policy requirements should be met. As a basic example, the wording of the policies should begin with a phrase like, “Development proposals shall...”.

The proposed policies should also be reviewed and amended where appropriate to ensure compliance with the ‘basic conditions’.

Officers are happy to assist further with advice and guidance. We would also be available to talk through these comments in the meeting, and provide assistance in refining the wording of policies if required. See also the guidance available at this page: [Toolkits and Guidance - Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#)

Appendix 1 – LNP Summary of Policies

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