

To: Cabinet
Date: 18 June 2025
Report of: Director of Planning and Regulation
Title of Report: Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	The Cabinet is requested to approve the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 consultation) Document for consultation. It is a Plan which is looking to accelerate the move to zero carbon building standards and continues to see housing delivery as a priority whilst ensuring we deliver a mixed and inclusive economy.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning
Corporate Priority:	Support thriving communities, Enable an inclusive economy; Pursue zero carbon Oxford; Deliver more affordable housing
Policy Framework:	The Local Plan is a statutory requirement. The scope of the policies is wide and encompasses all of the Council's corporate priorities

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet:

1. **Approve** the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 Consultation) document for public consultation;
2. **Authorise** the Director of Planning and Regulation to make any necessary minor editorial corrections to the documents and the supporting evidence base prior to going out to consultation.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 consultation) document
Appendix 2	Draft Sustainability Appraisal
Appendix 3	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 4	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18) document to be published for consultation (Appendix 1). This document builds on the work of the now withdrawn Oxford Local Plan 2040, reflecting changes in local context and national policy and updates to key evidence base documents.

The First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042

2. The Regulation 18 consultation is the first of two statutory consultations to be carried out before submission of a local plan to the Secretary of State in order that it may be independently examined. The First Draft Oxford Local Plan document presents a series of draft policies for public consideration. To inform those draft policies, a series of options on a range of topics have been identified and are detailed in background papers. These will also be available as part of the consultation, as they form part of the Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2). The main consultation document links to these policy options, alongside the draft policies.
3. Each chapter of the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 represents an overarching objective of the Plan. The following sections summarise key aspects of each chapter.

Vision and Strategy

4. The strategy for the plan is to take a balanced approach to development. The first step in any local plan is to understand needs and the next step is to try to meet these needs, within the bounds of key objective for the plan. Of primary importance is that the plan seeks to achieve sustainable development.
5. The Vision for Oxford in 2042 is that it will be a healthy and inclusive city, with strong communities that benefit from equal opportunities, not only in terms of access to housing and jobs, but to social and leisure opportunities, to healthcare and to the natural environment. Oxford will be a city with a strong cultural identity, that respects our heritage, whilst maximising opportunities to look forwards, to innovate, learn and enable businesses to prosper. The city will be supported to continue to make advancements in the life sciences and low carbon sectors. The protection of the environment is central, ensuring the city maintains its biodiversity, is well connected in terms of blue and green infrastructure and is resilient to climate change. We will utilise resources prudently, while mitigating impacts upon the natural environment. The city will be

net zero carbon by 2040, while our communities, buildings and infrastructure will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change or other emergencies.

6. The vision and strategy chapter contains a suite of draft policies that set out key features of the strategy. These include locational policies that support easily accessible facilities, and a plan-wide viability policy, which sets out when viability evidence may be submitted and a cascade for relaxing the policies and the policy approaches considered as having the most impact on viability, if robustly justified and supported by strong evidence.

A healthy inclusive city to live in

7. There is an urgent need for new homes in Oxford. The very high need for new housing means that general market prices for renting and buying are prohibitive for many. The challenges the workforce may face in finding accommodation mean that employers struggle to find and retain staff.
8. The NPPF requires that the overall housing need is understood and it puts forward the Standard Method as the only method by which this need should be calculated. The Standard Method for Oxford calculates the need as 1,087 dwellings per annum.
9. In addition to the overall housing need, various individual housing needs must be considered, and the plan is expected to attempt to meet these needs. The need for affordable housing is particularly significant in the city and amounts to 709 units per annum, and of this 458 per annum need is for those who cannot afford to either buy or rent. Social rented housing meets the needs of those most excluded from the housing market. Regardless of how high the need is, any policy requirement set for affordable housing must be viable and therefore deliverable. The preferred option as set out in Draft Policy H2 is to maximise the amount of social rented that can be provided and to set the affordable housing contributions at a level that can generally be afforded, which is 40% of housing schemes over 10 units. There will be schemes that have specific features that mean this level of affordable housing cannot be afforded, so when justified, Draft Policy S2 sets out a cascade approach.

A prosperous city with a globally important role in learning, knowledge and innovation

10. The First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 sets out draft policies that seek to identify and plan for the employment needs of the city over the plan period whilst recognising the balance of other land uses, particularly housing. Existing employment uses will be supported through the intensification, modernisation and regeneration of existing employment sites, including university and hospital sites. The strategy is that employment needs over the plan period can be met on existing sites. Key employment sites outside of the city and district centres are protected for their importance to the economy. Within the city centres and district centres, full flexibility is proposed, with no protection of sites (although new employment uses could be located here, recognising that within Use Class E, that includes many commercial uses, new employment uses could take place as a lawful use). Other draft policies are intended to help ensure benefits of the

successful economy are widely felt, such as the requirement for Community Employment and Procurement Plans and the Affordable Workspace draft policy.

A green, biodiversity city that is resilient to climate change

11. Ensuring people have access to a network of green and blue infrastructure, such as green spaces, is important in Oxford, and these networks need to be protected, as well as new green and blue infrastructure provided in new development where opportunities arise. Draft Policy G3 requires use of the Urban Greening Factor tool to encourage greening on new developments. The draft policies set out the policy requirements that seek to ensure applicants identify/assess and protect existing habitat value and add biodiversity and green features. It covers the approach the plan will take as to how the 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) required through the Environment Act 2021 should be delivered (Draft Policy G4). In addition to BNG, new development offers the opportunity to support additional biodiversity in the local area through sensitive and well thought out design that incorporates wildlife friendly measures that can support nature, such as bird and bat boxes, insect homes and wildflower meadows (Draft Policy G5).
12. The way we design and build has a key role to play in both mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Draft policies are included that address adaptation to climate change, including the need for buildings to be built that are resilient to the extreme weather events we are experiencing as the climate warms. There are also draft policies that address flood risk and require sustainable drainage.

A city that utilises its resources with care, protects the air, water and soil and aims for net zero carbon

13. If development is to be truly sustainable, then the city's natural resources must be appropriately stewarded to protect the natural environment, also ensuring public health is not negatively impacted by poor air and water quality.
14. Draft policies support the City Council's target of being a net zero carbon city by 2040. To ensure new development does not increase carbon emissions, policies seek to ensure that new buildings are net zero (Draft Policy R1). Draft policies also support reductions in carbon emissions in existing buildings through improvements to insulation and introducing retrofitting measures where possible (Draft Policy R3).

A cultural city that respects its heritage and fosters design of the highest quality

15. Delivering high quality urban design is about more than just how a building or street looks. It is also about ensuring development functions positively for the people who live and work there, including taking account the need to adapt to climate change, and that development is attractive and easy to move around, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. New development should respect and respond to the city's heritage and archaeology. The city's historic views into and across the city are encapsulated in the view cones and design should fully consider and respect these key views.

A liveable city with strong communities and opportunities for all

16. Accessibility to valued facilities, services and cultural opportunities is important for making strong local communities that enable people to thrive. Oxford is generally well serviced by local centres, so the focus of this chapter of the plan is on policies that protect them and focus new similar developments to those locations, which are already accessible, allowing linked trips and supporting continued success of those centres.
17. The policy approach towards motor vehicle parking is to continue to seek a downward pressure on both public and residential and non-residential parking across the city. Urban spaces created for people to move around safely, rather than designed to prioritise cars create safer, more attractive and enjoyable environments.

Development sites and infrastructure

18. In order to guide the right type and level of development to the optimal location, whilst fully considering the city's constraints, the Plan contains options for site allocation policies and Areas of Focus. The latter are defined areas across the city anticipated to experience more change as a result of new development (in some cases including development across the city boundary) during the Plan period. Some sites are newly identified, and rather than being put forward as proposed allocations, are put forward with the proviso that further evidence needs to be gathered to determine whether these sites are suitable for a development allocation. In addition to this, areas of search in the Green Belt are defined. The revised NPPF makes it clear that, when there are unmet needs within a planning authority area, the planning authority is required to look to the Green Belt to meet those needs (paragraph 146): *authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in this Framework and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt, when considered across the area of the plan.*
19. New development across the city results in additional infrastructure needs. This could range from the requirement for additional capacity at a city school, the introduction of a new cycle or pedestrian route or a contribution to a community or health facility. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), which details the key infrastructure needs within the city, will be updated as the 2042 Plan goes through the different stages of preparation. We will continue our engagement with utility and health providers and the county council to get the most up to date information about the city's current and future needs in terms of infrastructure.

Sustainability Appraisal

20. A draft sustainability appraisal has been carried out to assess the identified options against the sustainability objectives. The draft Sustainability Appraisal will be published alongside the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 Document and form part of the consultation.

Consultation

21. Engagement provides an important input in forming and shaping the local plan. Engagement and consultation on the Oxford Local Plan 2042 will be consistent with the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning and appropriate to the stage. Public engagement so far has involved the early engagement survey 17th March-28th April 2025. This was a non-statutory engagement exercise to seek early views from residents, businesses and other bodies to help identify the main issues being faced.
22. The aim of this next stage of consultation (Regulation 18) is to inform and check the direction of the plan. We anticipate that there will be a wide range of views to be considered from different communities and interests within and outside the city. Alongside the evidence base and Government policy, engagement will be important in informing policy direction, together with professional judgement. The consultation will be clear about the wider context and how this affects what the plan can and cannot do, recognising that there are constraints as to what can be included in a plan.
23. The consultation period is intended to commence on 28th June, and run until the 8th August.
24. There will be a further round of consultation, known as the 'proposed submission' plan (Regulation 19). The adopted timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme envisages the proposed submission plan being published for consultation in late Autumn 2025.

Financial implications

25. Work on the Oxford Local Plan 2042 has been structured to be able to progress whilst minimising financial implications. In particular, much of the existing evidence base and policy drafting from the Oxford Local Plan 2040 is still relevant and can continue to be used, although in some cases new evidence or more extensive revisions are required. In particular Employment Land Needs Assessment and jobs forecasting that took place as part of the HENA has been significantly reviewed, as has much of the housing evidence and also the Green Belt review to update the work in-line with the revised NPPF.
26. A budget has been calculated, and the work can be resourced by existing Planning Policy staff and can be funded by existing Planning Policy budgets and reserves. However, as the evidence base progresses, additional needs and therefore costs may be identified. The financial implications of producing a local plan include the costs of a local plan Examination (including Counsel's advice periodically throughout the preparation of the plan).

Legal issues

27. There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report. There are legal requirements that must be followed through the production of the Local Plan, which will be considered by the Inspector at Examination.
28. The process for preparing the Local Plan is set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town and County

Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Under Regulation 18 of the 2012 Regulations the Council must notify those who have an interest in the local plan and invite each of them to make representations. The consultation will include local residents, businesses, adjoining local authorities and other statutory bodies. In preparing the plan, the Council must consider any representation made to them in response to the invitations. The approach recommended will meet the requirements set out in Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for this stage of consultation.

Level of risk

29. A risk assessment has been undertaken (Appendix 3). All risks have been mitigated to an acceptable level.

Equalities impact

30. The Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 4.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

31. The council is committed to addressing the effects of, and reducing our contribution towards, climate change. In 2019, the council declared a climate emergency and has committed to a series of actions. The First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 has sustainability, climate change and climate adaptation and mitigation as core themes running throughout the plan. The document seeks to reflect this across all the chapters, whether it is through design policies, parking policies, flooding, drainage or how to ensure the most efficient use of land. The proposed submission draft Local Plan will be supported by a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment.

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Background Papers: None

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