

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGY

WHERE WE ARE

Oxford is an attractive place to live, work, study and visit, and is home to a diverse range of communities. Its environment is characterised by a wealth of built heritage that reflects many centuries of settlement, interspersed with high quality green and blue spaces that harbour a variety of ecologically important habitats.

The city has a broad, multi-faceted and active economy, with one of the highest concentrations of knowledge intensive businesses in the UK. This is enhanced by its historic role as a world-renowned seat of learning, with two universities and a strong research and innovation sector.

However, this attractiveness and success brings challenges for our people, the lives they lead and jobs they have, their communities and the environment. High demand for land results in high land values; congestion on the city's roads makes movement difficult and exacerbates poor air quality in certain areas; and the supporting infrastructure needs to keep pace with a changing and growing city. These challenges are intensified by national and international pressures such as rising build costs for new development, a chronic undersupply of housing, climate change and energy insecurity.

The role of this Local Plan is to carefully manage and guide new development so that it seeks to address the challenges we face and build upon the positive aspects of the city that make it so special. The Local Plan contains positive planning policies to ensure the optimum outcomes for the city's residents, environment, businesses, education and health institutions.

This Local Plan for the period 2025-2045 supersedes the Local Plan 2036 and the other relevant parts of the development plan including the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan. The vision for Oxford in 2045 seeks to address the strengths and challenges identified above.

In 2045 Oxford will be a healthy and inclusive city, with strong communities that benefit from equal opportunities for everyone, not only in access to housing, but to nature, employment, social and leisure opportunities and to healthcare.

Oxford will be a city with a strong cultural identity, that respects and values our heritage, whilst maximising opportunities to look forwards to innovate, learn and enable businesses to prosper.

The vision is one which supports research and development in the life sciences and health sectors which will continue to provide solutions to global challenges.

The environment will be central to everything we do; it will be more biodiverse, better connected and more resilient. Resources will be utilised prudently whilst mitigating our impacts on the soil, water, and air.

The city will be net zero carbon, whilst our communities, buildings and infrastructure will be resilient to the impacts of climate change and other emergencies.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

The vision for the city in 2045 is divided into key six themes which are illustrated in Figure 1.1. These are based on society, economy and environment as the three pillars of sustainability, and three themes which fall at the intersections of those pillars. Taken together, the six themes represent what we consider to be a sustainable future for Oxford. The themes are supported by a number of underlying objectives; in practice there will often be overlaps with some objectives being of relevance to more than one theme.

Figure 1.1: The six themes underpinning our vision for Oxford in 2045 – adapted from the three pillars of sustainability (society, economy and the environment)

1. SOCIETY

A healthy and inclusive city to live in

2. ENVIRONMENT

A green and biodiverse city that is resilient to climate change

3. ECONOMY

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

4. SOCIETAL / ECONOMY

A liveable city with strong communities and opportunities for all

5. SOCIETAL / ENVIRONMENT

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

6. ENVIRONMENT / ECONOMY

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

Local Plan 2045 theme	Underlying Local Plan 2045 objectives <i>The Oxford Local Plan 2045 will...</i>
A healthy and inclusive city to live in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise capacity for delivering homes across the city and set a housing requirement that seeks to meet the needs of different groups as far as possible. • Provide access to affordable, high-quality and suitable accommodation for all.
A green and biodiverse city that is resilient to climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure strong, well-connected ecological networks and net gains in biodiversity. • Be resilient and adaptable to climate change and resistant to flood risk and its impacts on people and property. • Protect and enhance Oxford's green and blue network. • Provide opportunities for sport, food growing, recreation, relaxation and socialising on its open spaces.
A fair and prosperous city with a globally important role in learning, knowledge and innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise the benefits of the city's strengths in knowledge, healthcare and education while supporting economic growth in key sectors including science and innovation. • Recognise the valuable contribution that supporting a range of businesses (including SMEs) can make to innovation and economic diversity. Help to create the conditions in which all businesses can prosper. • Create opportunities for everyone in the city to access employment. Support local people giving them access to training, education and apprenticeships to make the most out of new job opportunities created in the city. • Help Oxford to continue in its role as a national and international destination and support the visitor economy by encouraging longer stays and higher spend in Oxford.
A liveable city with strong communities and opportunities for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide neighbourhoods facilities needed to support our daily lives within a short walk from our homes, to support a liveable city. • Develop thriving local centres that support a variety of uses and foster activity throughout the day and night. • Value diversity whilst fostering greater inclusivity within our communities. • Create opportunities for supporting the transition to more sustainable/active forms of transport, including by reducing the need to travel, supporting good bicycle parking facilities and avoiding on and off-street car parking where possible across the city.
A city that respects its heritage and fosters design of the highest quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure well-designed buildings and public spaces that feel safe, that are sustainable, and that are attractive to be in and travel to. • Protect and enhance our valued and important heritage. • Curate a built environment that supports and enables people to be physically and mentally healthy.

A city that utilises its resources with care, protects the air, water and soil, and aims for net zero carbon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Oxford is ready for a net zero carbon future. • Ensure our resources, including land, soil, and raw materials, will be protected and used prudently, with consideration for replenishment and renewal. • Contribute towards continued improvement in the city's air quality and its further limit impacts upon public health. • Ensure the city's water resources are utilised efficiently with consideration for the future, whilst water quality is protected and enhanced for the benefit of the wider environment.
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OVERARCHING THREADS

In response to the complexities of planning in such a challenging but dynamic city and alongside a need to urgently respond to inequality and climate change, there are four particularly important threads which are wound throughout the Local Plan and supported by multiple policies across the different chapters. These relate to key issues and challenges facing the city which require a multi-faceted response and that are relevant to all six themes underpinning the vision and all of the objectives. As such, all the proposed policies will help to address these key issues.

The first overarching thread is that of **reducing inequalities** in the city. The Local Plan chapter 2 puts forward a range of requirements aimed at supporting access to affordable housing, as well as a good mix of housing, in order to help address housing inequality. Equally, chapter 3 sets out policies which seek to support the economy, including addressing unequal access to employment and training through options for policies requiring employment and skills plans as well as provision of affordable workspaces. Policies that are proposed for protecting, enhancing and providing new green infrastructure in chapter 4 are intended to help preserve access to and improve the natural environment across the city and there are other policies located in the document which also respond to this overarching thread.

The second thread is that of **addressing climate change**. In terms of reducing our emissions, the proposed policies of chapter 5 most directly address this issue covering topics such as net zero development, embodied carbon and supporting retrofitting of existing buildings, however, policies elsewhere in the Local Plan also address good urban design, parking, and bike storage which can enable people to live lower carbon lifestyles. Equally, a diverse range of policies can support adaptation and resilience to the expected impacts of climate change, from resilient design and construction, to flooding, green infrastructure and most of these sit within chapter 4, though other policies such as urban design and health impact assessment will also contribute.

The third overarching thread which runs throughout the document is that of **enabling a liveable city** and ensuring that communities are well supported and well served by having access to the basis of their daily needs within an easy walking distance of their homes. The Local Plan's proposed strategic policies discussed later in this chapter include a spatial strategy which sets out where types of development ought to be focused in the city and helps support this theme. Within subsequent chapters, there are policies which are put forward to focus on more specific

aspects of provision that we want to see in our neighbourhoods to help ensure the right balance of needs are met. These include policies on the protection of a network of green spaces across the city (chapter 4), as well as policies which address the provision of community facilities (chapter 7).

The fourth overarching thread is **securing delivery**. The strategy and policies of this Local Plan will only reduce inequality, address climate change and enable a liveable city if they are implemented and delivered upon. The City Council is clear in Policy S1 that applications which accord with the Local Plan will be approved without delay. To help facilitate the speedy progress of proposals through the planning process the City Council has set out in the policies clear expectations and requirements. Where policies require supporting evidence, this is to ensure that planning officers have all relevant information from the outset to enable speedy decision making. The City Council wants this plan to be being delivered quickly and to secure the real change envisaged in the vision.

SPATIAL STRATEGY AND PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Policy Context

- The aim of the plan is to understand and try to meet the city's needs, without having detrimental effects on economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives.
- The Plan sets a housing requirement, in Policy H1, that seeks to meet housing needs as far as possible using a capacity-based approach.
- The Local Plan's policies focus on delivering sustainable growth for Oxford, compliant with the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that meets the objectives, including by delivering affordable housing, supporting an inclusive economy, ensuring the protection of our green and blue networks and natural resources and supporting the city in moving towards being net zero carbon by 2040.
- The spatial strategy focuses on supporting Oxford's strengths in research and development, particularly related to health and education.
- The spatial strategy responds to climate change and the need to address and attempt to reduce it, including by carefully locating development so that facilities can be reached by sustainable travel.
- The spatial strategy is designed to ensure development responds appropriately to the context of the site, including heritage, green space, flooding and amenity.

Policy Implementation

- Applications that accord with the Local Plan will be approved without delay.

POLICY S1: SPATIAL STRATEGY AND PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Planning permission will be granted where development proposals accord with the policies of the Plan taken as a whole.

The City Council, through its policies and decisions, will positively pursue sustainable development and achieve sustainable growth in the delivery of homes, jobs and services to create a network of healthy, well-connected, high-quality areas where people want to live, play, learn and work in line with the vision and objectives of the Local Plan. To help achieve this it will aim to ensure development is located to:

- a) Ensure the continued strength and vibrancy of district and local centres so they continue to attract people and support a range of facilities that meet people's immediate needs conveniently within their local area;
- b) Whilst ensuring active frontages are retained, allow flexibility of uses within the city centre and district centres so that they can respond quickly to changing needs and economic circumstances and to ensure a wide mix of uses including housing is encouraged;
- c) Ensure new development is focused on areas with opportunities for sustainable travel links;
- d) Ensure activities that attract large numbers of people are centrally located in the city centre and district centres first, so they are easy to reach by walking, cycling and public transport;
- e) Focus new employment development on existing sites, redeveloping and intensifying to make best use of those sites and prioritising housing elsewhere;
- f) Ensure new uses are in locations where they will not harm the amenity of existing neighbouring uses;
- g) Direct new development away from locations where it would have a negative impact on important blue and green infrastructure networks, public open space, and result in loss of flood plain, also ensuring efficient use of land, helping to maximise opportunities on brownfield sites first.; and
- h) Take account of local historic context and respond appropriately to heritage significance.

When determining development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF). The Council will work proactively with applicants with the aim of finding solutions that mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the city.

All new proposals for development must conform with the principles of securing sustainable development, which ensures that the city is ready for a net zero carbon future, natural

resources and raw materials are used prudently and considerately, the air quality of the city is improved, and human health is safeguarded.

Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan (and, where relevant, with policies in any neighbourhood plans adopted in the future) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application, or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision, then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise, considering whether:

- i) the application of policies in the *National Planning Policy Framework* that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- j) any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the *National Planning Policy Framework* taken as a whole.

HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

Policy context

- Good design is a fundamental part of achieving many of the aims of the Plan. It is not just about creating aesthetically pleasing buildings, but also about placemaking, strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, promoting a sense of identity and people's health and well-being.
- The wider fundamental considerations include the need to make efficient use of limited land in the city, local character and history, the transition to net zero development, the delivery of improved energy efficiency, adaptability and resiliency to a changing climate, creation of spaces for nature and wildlife and nature, and providing multifunctional spaces that support the wellbeing of people.
- Oxford's heritage is a unique and irreplaceable resource, which has a fundamental role in shaping the city's character and cultural offer. Within this context, high quality, well designed new developments will likely become the heritage assets of the future. Good design can also help new development to sit more appropriately on challenging sites or in certain locations which are more sensitive to change.
- Some parts of the city will experience change in accordance with the policies of the development plan at a pace that may be rapid. Development proposals in these areas will require added design consideration so that their impacts are managed to avoid harms and maximise the benefits that new development can bring about.

Policy Implementation

- All development proposals will be expected to have been derived from a comprehensive approach to design from the outset and will be expected to demonstrate this through supporting material including a Design and Access Statement, Planning Statement or other means to address the checklist provided in Appendix 1.1.
- Policies elsewhere in the Plan also set requirements which help to secure high quality design, and to conserve and enhance historic assets, and character.
- Specific locations such as Areas of Focus, site allocations and city and district centres have associated design guidance as part of their respective policies.
- In addition, the City Council is committed to preparing, reviewing and adopting (as appropriate) development briefs, local design codes or guidance when a need arises, and will support neighbourhood planning groups who wish to produce design guidance for their areas.

POLICY S2: HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

A holistic, considered approach to design will help ensure that design proposals meet a wide range of policies of the Local Plan, and is an important element of ensuring efficient use of land is made. The design checklist set out in Appendix 1.1 should be used to inform design and ensure that a comprehensive approach is taken from the outset, which includes consideration of:

- Context
- Built form,
- Movement,
- Public spaces,
- Identity and character,
- Nature and green infrastructure,
- Resources,
- Homes and buildings,
- Lifespan

For Areas of Focus, the City Centre and District Centres, and other areas with more detailed guidance, proposals should refer to and align with the design principles set out in the Local Plan or in supporting documents such as SPDs and development briefs. The City Council will be proactive in producing additional local design codes or guidance when a need arises with the involvement of the local community, landowners and other stakeholders, and will support neighbourhood planning groups who wish to produce design guidance for their areas.

In recognition of the significance of Oxford's heritage, and as part of its positive approach to the historic environment, consideration is given by the Plan to ensuring the continued conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, as part of good design achieved by bespoke policies (HD1-HD6), and individual site allocation and area of focus policies in Chapter 8. Opportunities for heritage-led regeneration are supported, and the Plan strategy

supports the conservation and appreciation of key characteristics of the city's townscape and urban landscape.

INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Policy context

- The success of new development and the response of local communities in which it is located is often linked to the provision of infrastructure to ensure that increased demand and pressures (e.g., on local roads, services and facilities) are addressed.
- Infrastructure needs to be funded and delivered in a timely manner. Developer contributions and the delivery of infrastructure will be sought through the most appropriate mechanism available, using the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and planning obligations (e.g., Section 106 (S106) or S278 agreements)
- The Community Infrastructure Levy is a tariff in the form of a standard charge on development. This applies on the basis that almost all development has some impact on infrastructure, so should contribute to the cost of providing or improving infrastructure.
- Planning obligations are used to make new development acceptable in planning terms; legal obligations that must meet specific statutory tests; and are enforceable and run with the land.
- **Policy implementation**
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. The IDP is a 'live' document, that is regularly updated and includes:
 - An assessment of the city's current infrastructure and identified requirements;
 - Evidence of a funding gap between committed and required infrastructure;
 - An Infrastructure Delivery Schedule that highlights infrastructure projects needed to support the city's planned development needs to 2045.
- A range of public and private bodies are responsible for delivering infrastructure and facilities to support development and the wider population, for example education, health, emergency services, transport, utilities and environmental provision. The City Council has worked with these providers in developing this plan, however, additional early engagement with the relevant body or provider

should be undertaken when those elements form a part of the proposal or would have a particular impact on them.

- Delivering certain infrastructure projects has the potential to deliver transformational improvements, and to collectively increase the accessibility to a wider workforce across the city and the wider Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor area as well as bringing significant localised benefits. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan identifies key transformational projects, such as:
 - Oxford Railway Station (incorporating public realm, capacity and interchange improvements and will enable the delivery of East-West Rail).
 - Re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line to passenger trains (and the delivery of new stations to service key employment sites in the south of the city such as Oxford Science Park and ARC Oxford).
- It is likely significant funding will be required to deliver these transformational opportunities. As such, certain sites within the Cowley Branch Line Area of Focus (Policy CBLAOF) will be expected to help contribute to their delivery.

POLICY S3: INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY IN NEW DEVELOPMENT

The Council will work with infrastructure providers, developers and other key stakeholders to support the delivery of the infrastructure necessary to enable the development set out in the Local Plan. The projects required to support the Local Plan strategy are identified within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be reviewed to ensure infrastructure information remains up to date and is monitored effectively.

Developers will be expected to engage early with the Council and infrastructure service providers to discuss their requirements. Developers must demonstrate they have explored existing infrastructure capacity, and how this could be future-proofed, with appropriate providers and demonstrate that they have made sufficient provision. Where appropriate, and where there is an identified shortfall across the city, opportunities should be taken to maximise infrastructure provision on suitable sites.

Development proposals, including those allocated in this Local Plan that give rise to a need for infrastructure improvements, will be expected to mitigate their impact, both individually and cumulatively, and at a rate and scale to meet the needs that arise from that development or a phase of that development. The standards of

infrastructure delivery will be expected to comply with other policies set out within this Plan.

Planning permission will be granted subject to the provision of (or appropriate funding towards) the required level of infrastructure to support the development. Infrastructure identified within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan or through negotiations on individual planning applications will be delivered either through on-site provision or off-site contributions and secured by S106, S278 or other appropriate agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or its successor as well as other identified sources of funding as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Development proposals which rely on the delivery of critical infrastructure projects to support the development, will only be permitted prior to completion of that project or where appropriate, a phase of that project which has been identified as necessary in the IDP, where the council is content that the infrastructure or phase of that infrastructure will be in place within a reasonable timetable from the date of permission.

Proposals to enhance the city's rail and bus network will be supported. In particular, proposals for improvements to Oxford Railway Station that increase network capacity and support the Cowley Branch Line (CBL) will be supported. Oxford Railway Station should be transformed to facilitate integrated transport with enhanced entrances, additional secure cycle storage, cycle racks, new bus interchange facilities and new priority public areas.

Enhancements to public transport accessibility in the south-east of the city are needed to support the anticipated intensification of existing employment uses and new residential development. Supporting existing public transport and the reopening of the Cowley Branch Line to passengers would enable a reduction in car use to this area. Financial contributions from new trip-generating development within a 1,500m buffer zone of the proposed CBL stations will be expected in order to achieve public transport enhancements in this area, including, amongst other sustainable transport measures, the delivery of the CBL. Outside the 1,500m buffer area, financial contributions from new trip-generating development would be sought on a case-by-case basis. These will be tested in accordance with Paragraph 58 (or updated equivalent) of the NPPF.

PLAN VIABILITY

Policy Context

- The NPPF (paragraph 35) requires that policies for contributions should not undermine the deliverability of the Plan.
- Planning Practice Guidance sets out that viability assessment should not compromise sustainable development but should be used to ensure that policies are realistic, and that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine deliverability of the plan.
- As such, the Plan needs to deliver development that is viable, and a Local Plan viability assessment has informed the level of contributions sought in policies.

Policy Implementation

- Where a site faces exceptional costs that could not have been anticipated in the whole plan viability assessment (for example, land contamination which requires remediation), the policy sets out the basis for negotiations relating to viability, the council's priorities for contributions, and the expectations for evidence required to demonstrate viability.
- The viability assessment for the Plan identifies the policies which are likely to have the greatest potential impacts upon site viability include the parking Policy C8, net zero buildings in operation Policy R1, and the affordable housing contributions Policies H2 to H5). The policies identified as being most impactful on viability will not apply in all cases.
- Where the combined impact of policies in the Plan results in a site being unable to deliver a viable development because of a site-specific circumstance, development should proceed in a way that ensures maximum compliance with planning policies. The policy guides the process of making amendments to proposals to ensure viability in a way that the intention of the policies is met as far as possible (the “cascade”).
- The policy prioritises delivering affordable housing in this stepped cascade approach. So whilst negotiations will be on a case-by-case basis, the retention of affordable housing delivery will be prioritised over other policy considerations.
- The City Council will work with applicants to understand where the largest costs savings can be made in terms of items that may trigger non-compliance with policy (such as energy offsetting or parking) and will weigh up the planning (and public interest) merits of doing so but will actively engage with developers before any negotiation is undertaken.

POLICY S4: PLAN VIABILITY

The policies in the Plan have been viability tested and planning applications that fully comply with them will generally be assumed to be viable.

The City Council will always expect developers to have considered the financial implications of affordable housing policy requirements, and local market indicators, when purchasing the land for development.

If the combined impact of the policies in the Plan do result in a site being unable to deliver a viable development, and if an applicant can demonstrate particular circumstances that

justify the need for a viability assessment, negotiations will take place on an 'open book' basis, informed by robust evidence in the form of an independent viability appraisal carried out by independent assessors appointed by the City Council in agreement with the applicant.

If the applicant can demonstrate through an open book approach, the development to be unviable, the relevant cascade approach below should be worked through with the City Council until development is viable as follows:

Housing viability cascade

Step 1) Where it is clearly demonstrated that any offsetting against the targets in Policy R1 Net Zero Buildings in Operation cannot be fully achieved, payments towards energy offsetting should be reduced incrementally until viability is achieved. The development itself must remain free of fossil fuel use to ensure that it is net zero carbon ready and does not conflict with Net Zero Carbon targets for the city and nationally.

Step 2) If the development remains unviable after step 1, and the low car requirement in the parking policy impacts upon site viability, then this must be clearly set out in the planning application, including setting out the site-specific circumstances that lead to it being unviable. In the first instance, allocating spaces to units should be considered. If the development is still not viable, increasing the number of spaces incrementally, up to the maximum parking standards, which will be no more than one space per unit for residential schemes.

Step 3) If on relevant sites (of 10 or more units), following the adjustments in steps 1 and 2 to achieve viability, it can be robustly proven that meeting the affordable housing policy requirements will make a site unviable, then the following steps should be followed:

Firstly, reduce the number of affordable housing units provided by reducing the intermediate housing element only, whilst retaining the social rent element in full;
Secondly, if the development is still not viable, continue to reduce the amount of social rent incrementally until viable.

Contributions from employment-generating uses viability cascade

If on relevant sites (of 1000sqm or more net gain) for employment-generating uses it can be robustly proven that the combined policy requirements will make a site unviable, developers and the City Council will work through a cascade approach that prioritises contributions to affordable housing in the following order until a scheme is made viable.

Step 1) , where it is clearly demonstrated that any offsetting against the targets in Policy R1 Net Zero Buildings in Operation cannot be fully achieved, payments towards energy offsetting should be reduced incrementally until viability is achieved. The development

itself must remain free of fossil fuel use to ensure that it is net zero carbon ready and does not conflict with Net Zero Carbon targets for the city and nationally.

Step 2), affordable housing contributions - If the development remains unviable after step 1, payments towards affordable housing should be reduced incrementally until viability is achieved.

Contributions from mixed use sites

For mixed use sites, the viability cascade should be applied on the employment-generating uses in the first instance, ahead of the affordable housing cascade, in order to prioritise the delivery of onsite affordable housing.