

Draft Housing Strategy Feedback Consultation Report.

We invited members of the public to comment on the Draft Housing Strategy 2012 2015 via e consult the Oxford City Council on line consultation tool. Invitations to join the consultation were automatically sent to those who had registered an interest in housing and related issues in their profiles. Further invitations to join the consultation were sent by post and email to Local Strategic Partner members, Tenant and Resident Associations, Landlord Forum members, Registered Providers and Oxford City Council staff. Deadline for responses was 13 February 2012.

There were 20 responses to the online consultation the analysis of which can be seen below

- 65% of respondents found the Draft Housing Strategy easy or very easy to understand
- 55 % of respondents agreed with the priorities which had been set for the DHS
- 70% of respondents said there were things we had missed out which were important to housing in Oxford.
- 35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the DHS met the challenges for housing in Oxford over the next 3 years.
- 55% disagreed that we were meeting the challenge of housing in Oxford.

We also asked respondents to answer the following questions in more detail. A number of common themes were apparent.

What, if anything in your opinion should we give greater priority to in the housing strategy?

Building, Planning and Growth

[“More affordable/social housing”](#)

“Building new council housing rather than focusing on private landlord rental. The council need to take ownership of the social housing not by farming it out to others.”

[“Include the concept that increased commercial development is directly linked to housing shortage since it attracts incoming workers. Disallow non-residential development in order to reduce the number of incoming workers who add to the demand for housing. This is very obvious in](#)

Headington where over-development of the University and health sector has given just this result - along with increased traffic and loss of green space.”

“Small clusters of around 200-250 homes all around the city “

“staying within the city boundary”

“Very high priority to 3 and 4 bedroom homes for rental.“

Private Sector and Legislation

“availability of rented accommodation for the young and disadvantaged including students and business people seeking to work in the county. Removal of restrictive regulations on HMOs over and above that required by legislation. Remove the requirement for planning permission to use property as a non-licensable HMO as defined by legislation”

“The quality of HMOs - although we may need time for accreditation scheme to have effect.”

Empty Homes

“Empty homes initiative - to make better use of what is already built without the need to gobble up more land with new build.”

“Getting empty homes available to be lived in, reducing the need for new builds”

Environment and Conservation

Give greater protection to green space both in and around Oxford.
Pay attention to the hydrological effects of development

“1)

Strong and Active Communities

2)

A Vibrant and Sustainable economy “ - ??

Other

“Local people (ie. born in Oxford) should have housing priority.”

“The objectives in the draft housing strategy do not adequately address most of the strategic objectives set out at the beginning of the document. The strategy focuses on the social rented sector, which is an important but small part of housing in Oxford. The Council's housing strategy needs to go beyond the social rented sector. In particular it needs to include, actively promote and

normalise cohousing and in doing this would stand more chance of meeting many more of the city's strategic objectives.”

“Families living in temporary private, shared accommodation. “

“Consultation”

What housing issues in Oxford, if any, do you think should be added to the draft Housing Strategy 2012-2015?

Building, Planning and Growth

“Oxford has a massive affordability housing crisis with a great deal of sub-standard housing. There is huge housing need identified in the evidence base and severe affordability problems across all tenures. We need bolder ideas, experimentation and innovation in the housing sector, not just for the homeless and social rented sector, but for key workers, professionals, and families on low to medium incomes. Co housing (www.cohousing.org.uk) is an innovative approach to housing that can provide a supportive community environment for all tenures and help to free up much-needed social housing.”

“Oxford is a small city and i believe the boundary should be pushed to find land around the city on which to build. Unless you build up you build out. Oxford's infrastructure cannot be improved sufficiently to make it sustainable for the long term.”

“Specifically disallow development which imports staff from other cities eg London, as on the Churchill site. Residents were actually told it would 'attract people from all over the world'.
Re-consider the underlying assumption that Oxford must increase in size”

“I feel the council should be encouraging developers to build homes for rental to the young professional market. Currently, the rental market is very insecure - it seems to be made up of mostly individual private landlords who can terminate contracts with one month's notice. I have friends who have had to move because their landlady has split up with their boyfriend and needs to move back home. Others have to move because the landlord decides to sell. We need stable rental options as people can't afford to buy. As it is, individuals buy new-build flats and then rent them out, able to terminate the rental agreement at any point. There should be some set aside for rental and managed professionally. “

“Small clusters of around 200-250 homes all around the city “

Private Sector and Legislation

“A sound appreciation of how the real world works. The strategy will put off investment in the private rented sector which is the only sector that is likely to have funds available to make a difference to the supply and quality of housing available for the homeless.”

“Inspect all HMOs and enforce regulations”

Student Housing

“Reduce the number of students occupying residential accommodation to the 3,000 agreed with the Universities. The actual number is far higher. A reduction in student numbers would solve this.”

“Although a separate issue I don't think a Housing Strategy can be formed without mentioning purpose built student accommodation and the effect this could have on freeing up houses in the city “

“I feel that due to high tuition fees there should be a freeze on building student accommodation”

“Plans to limit number of HMOs in those areas of the city with large student populations”

Empty Homes

“Prioritise the Empty Homes initiative. “

Environment and Conservation

“Consequences of running out of any where to build any more houses. Green spaces and important wildlife sites must be preserved and protected within the city for the wildlife and the health and well being of the people living nearby. This is a big challenge which does not seem to be being adequately planned for. There will come a point when Oxford is 'full' and it seems not far off. What then?”

“Conservation of the city's character and a long-term view. 2012-2015 is short term and the pressure to meet short-term targets (particularly in the current economic climate) will not necessarily deliver long-term value. Has the city council delivered long-term value over the last 15 years when for the majority of that time, the economic climate was good?”

“The fact that green space IS very important.
NO-ONE wants an ever spreading concrete jungle, thank you”

Other

“Patients who are physically disabled or who have limited time left have no home to go to or cannot return home. More joined up working when patients admitted so more time to find more suitable accommodation. Possibly convert a sheltered block as interim accommodation, either to move to permanent or remain there until they die. Funding - bed blocking serious problem, adapting properties expensive therefore partnership between Oxford City and County

Councils and PCT. Better quality of life and more efficient with time and resource. “

“There is no mention of a strategy to deal with persons given social housing who then abuse that privilege. You should have a strong policy of removing social housing from those who indulge in anti social behaviour when living in it. “

“Capturing greater media attention - in national as well as local media - on the housing crisis in Oxford that the strategy seeks to address. That the housing crisis in Oxford also constitutes a social crisis - exacerbating poverty, social exclusion, and de facto class and wealth segregation - needs to be made clear to the public. It must be made clear to central government that a nationally coherent housing strategy is required - and has been lacking many, many years.”

“single people still living with parent due to unaffordability “

Further comments made

Building, Planning and Growth

“There is patently not enough housing being provided by the council to help people on the waiting list. “

“Stop over-development as in Headington, swamped in recent years by the NHS and 2 universities. This has directly led to increased pressure on housing.

Ensure Council housing goes to Oxford 'locals' rather than incomers.

Ensure new build really does include (3.6.3 Point 4 in your document)

improved infrastructure (none provided in Headington to my knowledge).

Section 106 payments are a token gesture and do not address the problems caused by the development in question. They are often used simply to implement a pre-existing Council policy eg on parking. Additional allotments, for example, are needed.

Re-open so-called 'disused' allotment sites to provide food-growing opportunities for the increasing population.

Accept the concept that Oxford is BIG ENOUGH and increased growth is detrimental, not advantageous to its citizens.” (see comment on Student housing below)

“The city centre and within the ring road is incredibly densely populated. Any further housing on infill sites is just going to place impossible burdens on infrastructure, parking, access to open and green spaces, etc. Please keep pushing for building on the land near Grenoble Road so we can have properly planned, large new housing area with bus services, churches, shops, schools, play areas, green spaces, etc. “

“I feel the number of houses planned to be built is too small in view of the large waiting list for social housing “

“Need to look at some brown field sites in the North Oxford area - which don't seem to feature in this plan - for new housing provision.”

“The focus is on buildings rather than community. Developing a sense of shared community, stewardship of the city and working for each other would be a positive approach that does not necessarily require huge resources. Building what has the potential to be a sink estate, cut off from the rest of the city by the ring road, is a huge gamble with resources and people's lives. Are communities such as Barton and Blackbird Leys considered to be model examples of what can be achieved and considered successes as judged by independent socio-economic measures? “

“I'm not convinced that the history of housing provision in the city over the last few decades fills one with confidence.”

Private Sector and Legislation

“Over regulation will mean goals not achievable “

Student Housing

“Need to acknowledge different patterns of home ownership. Reduce spread of student housing (even dedicated accommodation uses valuable space that could be used for social housing). “

“Student numbers in residential accommodation should be reduced to the agreed 3,000”

“By requiring both of Oxford's universities to have no more than 3,000 students each in private accommodation, the City Council will help to prevent a disproportionate amount of the city's private rented accommodation being made unavailable to other residents, including, importantly, **key workers on low incomes**. However, this requirement alone will not be sufficient to prevent an imbalance in communities, if the universities are allowed to expand unchecked provided each keeps within the 3,000 limit. **Already, according to the Key Facts statistics referred to (above), students account for 26% of the city's population. Although the universities offer benefits for the local economy, an unchecked growth in student numbers will lead to a weakening of the influence that long-term, Council-Tax-paying, residents have on their living environment.**”

Empty Homes

“Increase resources for the Empty Homes initiative (in line with the point above ‘Stop over development in Headington’ under Building, Planning and Growth).”

Environment and Conservation

“Given that a Core Strategy aim is to 'Help protect people and their property from flooding', an important target would be to make sure the infrastructure can cope or is upgraded before building any houses. This is particularly important as regards sewer capacity, to avoid sewage up welling over the city and flooding. In fact hydrological issues resulting from development need a much higher importance than has previously been given, in light of climate change predictions.”

“ we believe the City Council – as well as the wider planning community - should give serious consideration to how much further development, of any kind, Oxford can take without giving rise to considerable problems with the adequate provision of services and a noticeable degradation in the quality of life of its inhabitants.”

Other

“Housing is integral to many strategic issues and unless the housing strategy takes into account its broader context it will continue to fail not just the most vulnerable but also the city as a whole. Oxford cannot claim to be World Class when it has no examples of the kind of housing which will positively contribute to a wide range of strategic objectives and meet the government's definition of sustainable development (ref National Policy Planning Framework). “

“I think problems are highlighted but the 'solutions' often don't address the root cause of the issue. I think the strategy is a marked improvement though. “

“Too much clutter in the document, it should focus on housing and not on other council priorities as this creates confusion. Perhaps they should have been grouped in a section at the end.”

“I agree that tackling homelessness, especially rough sleeping should be the top priority. There should be a way for people and companies to contribute to hostel rooms for rough sleepers rather than people having to depend on begging. “

“At times it feels that decisions are made without real consultation.”

“There is no mention of a strategy to deal with persons who are given social housing who then go on to abuse this privilege. You should have a strong policy of removing social housing from those who engage in anti social behaviour when living in it.”

Two further detailed responses were received

1. A response analysing key housing and wider issues and demonstrating the merits of co-housing opportunities to meet many objectives and aims
2. A response highlighting issues in relation to pressures on land in Oxford, impact of student accommodation, physical and community sustainability of any further development

In addition, a range of partners were invited to a meeting to discuss the draft Housing Strategy. Matters raised and discussed are set out below as brief bullet points – to be taken into account for new Housing and other Strategies.

Affordable housing and private rented sector

- Supported housing and lack of move on accommodation eg private rented housing
- What can we offer private rented sector to encourage housing those in need
- Direct payment of Housing and Universal Benefit – Oxford CC OCHA taking part in Demonstration Project from June 2012 – will be rolled out nationally in 2013
- Impact of supported housing review on rent levels
- Challenges ahead – can focus on direction of travel but targets/current performance harder to attain
- Those providers delivering new homes funded by HCA have less grant, are obliged to offer Affordable Homes at up to 80% rent on new homes and a proportion of re lets and there is potential for disposals
- Need to monitor impact of enhanced RTB
- Potential enhanced role of the council as a developer/provider of new homes
- Issues of students living in the community, demand for Oxford as a University continues to be high – bucking national trends
- Impact of single room rent – more HMOs? Need to be able to access smaller private rented properties – which landlords etc
- HMO market – some getting out but others coming into market. Potentially more lucrative (capital gain) compared to a large family home.

Homelessness

- Decisions will be taken on discharge of duty in private sector and offers of accommodation outside the area – New guidance anticipated in the summer
- Consultation on allocations review
- 80% of people on Housing Register in Band 5 – low priority and unlikely to be offered accommodation - need to focus on those in most need

- Issues with keeping families together – family unable to continue to house largest cause of homelessness presentations
- Need to debate policy on children sharing bedrooms
- Consider prioritisation for housing based on employment and community contribution
- No 2nd Night Out – faster pathways, could this de-prioritise sofa surfers and use on non accommodation based support
- Half a million pound reduction in homelessness services SP funding – Oxford largest reduction
- Need to retain Homelessness Prevention Funds and use of Discretionary Housing Payments
- Children’s services – impact of non-statutory homelessness opportunity for joint provision
- More information on homelessness analysis
- Role of Tenancy Relations Officer and illegal eviction – could be potential for more rises with high demands and diminished household income eg single room rent
- Access to external funding but some bids not taken forward eg social inclusion – need to seek further opportunities
- A Tenant Ready Scheme could be a low cost high impact project

Housing Support

- Need to consider consultation outcomes on supported rents as well as furnished properties – big effect locally - potentially both SP and HB cuts
- Need to consider wider funding streams eg Health, DAAT

Improve housing conditions

- Limited ability for OCC to fund – specifically essential repairs, targeted flexible loans, top up DFGs
- Increasing action to inspect HMOs – started Jan 2011 and phase 2 launched Jan 2012. 800 applications. About 20% of these were not previously known. Only a small number have been licensed without any extra works being required.
- Prosecution action is being taken and one house has been taken over
- Hopeful that impact will be more planned preventions and fewer complaints needing reactive action

Following the event one partner who could not attend asked for the following to be noted:

- Move on Planning
- Consider the needs of offenders
- Review inter-agency protocols and working on dealing with potentially dangerous clients

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