

Topic Paper – Local Plan Spatial Strategy

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Scope of Topic Paper

The purpose of this topic paper is to explain the evolution of the spatial strategy through the Local Plan's development.

The Local Plan has a Vision, Strategic Objectives, a Spatial Strategy as well as Policy STRAT1 which are all relevant parts of the Plan which require consideration of updates to the Local Plan's 'Spatial Strategy'.

The First Publication version Local Plan (October 2017) is the version of the Local Plan which required an update following:

1. The decision to review strategic allocations for the emerging Local Plan;
2. Responding to comments received at the previous Regulation 19 Consultation;
3. Responding to changes to the National Planning Policy Framework

The First Publication version Local Plan's Spatial Strategy is contained in full at Appendix 1. This strategy was evaluated and reviewed before changes were made to the strategy for the Second Publication version Local Plan was published in January 2019.

Earlier versions of the Local Plan

The Council has previously consulted on earlier versions of the Local Plan at the following stages:

- Issues and Scope (June 2014)
- Refined Options (February 2015)
- Preferred Option Local Plan (June 2016)
- Second Preferred Option Local Plan (March 2017)
- Publication Version Local Plan First (October 2017)

The vision, strategy and evolution of elements related to the spatial strategy throughout the Local Plan process are discussed in this topic paper. A commentary of relevant considerations and outcomes at each key stage of the strategy's development is provided.

Issues and Scope – June 2014

During the consultation on the Issues and Scope, almost 4,000 comments from nearly 800 respondents were received.

Settlements and Housing

The Issues and Scope asked two related questions about settlements in South Oxfordshire:

“Which are the most sustainable settlements?”

“Do you think we need to change the settlement assessment and settlement hierarchy, and if so what changes should we make?”

“In the Core Strategy we introduced a more detailed assessment of which services or facilities were available in towns and villages. Using this data we classified each settlement into a hierarchy (towns, larger villages, smaller villages and other villages).

We used the settlement assessment to set out in Core Strategy policy which levels of housing growth are appropriate to different sized settlements in the district (most growth to our towns, some to the larger villages, a little housing to the smaller and other villages, and none in the open countryside). The aim was to direct most new homes to the towns as the most sustainable places for new homes, but also keep our villages vibrant and help support their services with a small increase in population. With the reduction in household sizes forecast, we know that just to keep the population of a village at 3,000 people, we need to plan 110 extra new homes in that village by 2026. Our strategy planned for a strong network of settlements across the district and helped ensure that almost everyone in the district lives within 5km of a service centre with a reasonable level of services and facilities, helping keep the whole district sustainable.

The policies in the Core Strategy then allocate different scales of housing and employment growth to different types of settlements.

We need to consider how we are going to deal with the increased housing numbers and whether we can deliver the additional housing if we continue with the same settlement hierarchy. Some places may have more potential to take growth. We want to know what you think about how we undertake the settlement assessment and what you think of the resulting network of sustainable settlements in the district.”

There were options or ideas presented in the Issues and Scope including:

- Increase the number of larger villages?
- Change the criteria?
- Identify core criteria?
- Weight the criteria?
- Not have a settlement hierarchy at all?

The Issues and Scope then asked:

“Where should the new housing go?”

“The housing already planned in the Core Strategy for the towns and larger villages will carry on as planned. We now have the opportunity to consider how to distribute the additional housing we need to plan for. This could be up to 5,900 additional new homes above and beyond those we’ve already planned.

We identify some options for where we could distribute the additional housing. The solution could be a combination of these options, or you may also have your own suggestions.”

The Issues and Scope then presented some options:

“Option a:

Continue to use the Core Strategy distribution strategy

55% of homes at Didcot, of the remainder 60% to market towns and 40% to the larger villages.

Pros

- *Tried and tested at examination by an independent inspector*
- *Based on locating growth where there are services and facilities*
- *number of homes based on proportional size of existing settlement (although more at Didcot growth point)*

cons

- *Increases growth pressure in places where housing is already allocated (fairness)*
- *not necessarily the most sustainable locations or those with best opportunities to be so*
- *doesn’t automatically take account of designations, constraints and infrastructure issues*
- *Some of the smaller settlements might miss out on some desired growth for local affordable housing for example*
- *could create housing market saturation in Didcot (that in turn could lead to 5 year supply problems in Didcot)*

Option B:

Science Vale focus plus ‘sustainable settlements’

Focus on Science Vale area (60%) with the remainder across ‘sustainable settlements’ (40%) (likely to be Thame, Wallingford, Henley and some less constrained larger villages e.g. Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Sonning Common and Watlington).

Pros

- *Based on locating housing where it can support economic growth and in the most*

sustainable places

- *Works well with the Science Vale area action Plan and the associated increase in employment*
- *Takes account of existing policy designations such as Green Belt and area of Outstanding natural Beauty*

cons

- *Puts more homes in places where housing is already allocated (this might be seen as unfair)*
- *Will require a fresh approach to assessing the sustainability of settlements*
- *Some of the smaller settlements might miss out on some desired growth for local affordable housing for example*
- *Timescales and funding needed for the infrastructure required to support this level of growth is untested*
- *There is a risk that relying on a few larger sites with high infrastructure requirements would not deliver homes fast enough to maintain our five year land supply*

Option c:

All in Science Vale

All additional housing in Science Vale.

Pros

- *Based on locating housing where it can support growth*
- *Provides a focus for the delivery of infrastructure and services potentially at a more competitive return*
- *Supports the aspirations of the Science Vale area action Plan*

cons

- *Some of the smaller settlements might miss out on some desired growth for local affordable housing for example*
- *Timescales and funding needed for the infrastructure required to support this level of growth is untested*
- *Could create housing market saturation in Science Vale by concentrating development in one area*
- *There is a risk that relying on a few larger sites with high infrastructure requirements would not deliver homes fast enough to maintain our five year land supply*

Option d:

All growth in a single new settlement

All additional housing in a single new settlement in the shaded area of the district which is not in the Green Belt or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Pros

- *Would provide a second growth area in the district which would widen opportunities for growth in the future*
- *Not in the Green Belt or AONB*
- *Near M40 corridor*
- *Close proximity to Oxford and High Wycombe*
- *Opportunities for holistic planning including design and infrastructure*

cons

- *Not well located to support employment growth in Science Vale*
- *Not well located for sustainable transport, particularly the rail network and would therefore likely to be car based settlement*
- *Having to create sufficient interest from developers and service providers to work together to deliver the project*
- *New town is likely to be long in the planning so unlikely to be able to secure delivery of a 5 year land supply*

Option e:

Dispersal

Make land allocations for new homes at all towns, larger and smaller villages, and introduce a more permissive approach to infill development in the smallest villages (but still not hamlets or open countryside).

Pros

- *Would reduce pressure on areas already identified for growth in the core Strategy*
- *Some of the smaller settlements get the opportunity to allow some desired growth, for local affordable housing for example*
- *Under the forthcoming community Infrastructure Levy, most developments will contribute money to an infrastructure pot, even if they are on small and dispersed sites*

cons

- *Would result in housing in some not particularly sustainable locations in transport terms*
- *Homes not necessarily near the new jobs*
- *Would spread the need for infrastructure improvements across a wide number of settlements so could be more costly*
- *Resource intensive to assess sites and make allocations at so many settlements, therefore could slow down the plan-making process meaning we fail to identify enough homes to maintain our five year land supply*

Non-place specific options

Option F:

Next to neighbouring major urban areas

Our rural district lies immediately adjacent to the major town of Reading and the city of Oxford. Here there are many employment opportunities as well as universities, regional hospitals and bigger shopping centres. One option would be to put our housing growth on the edge of these neighbouring urban areas.

Pros

- *It would mean more homes are close to the main centres of employment and facilities*
- *A reprieve for our towns and larger villages already taking growth*

cons

- *Would not support economic growth areas in Science Vale*
- *Some of our smaller settlements might miss out on some desired growth for local affordable housing for example*
- *Neighbouring authorities may try to argue that the additional homes in our area should be counted towards meeting their needs*
- *Oxford option would result in a major incursion into the Green Belt*
- *To date we have always objected to proposals for strategic development in the Oxford Green Belt*

Option G:

Raising densities

We could fit in more growth on a smaller area of land by encouraging higher densities in new development. Our current policy, Core Strategy policy CSH2, sets a minimum of 25 dwellings per hectare, which is quite a low density. We set this to make sure that developments are planned sensitively to fit with their settings. However, there are many examples of higher density development which still work well. Higher density doesn't automatically mean small flats, cramped living, no gardens, not enough parking and poor design. The examples in the boxes below show some higher density developments in our district in the recent past.

Pros

- *More efficient use of land and uses less greenfield land*
- *Some communities may prefer to have a single site developed more densely rather than accept another site*
- *Works well in town and village centres and in conversions*
- *Would work well where we are planning specialist accommodation for older people in purpose built flats or nursing homes*
- *could be combined with other options presented here*

cons

- *May not reflect the character of existing settlements*
- *Higher numbers on a site increases pressure on its access, junctions etc*
- *Unlikely to yield enough alone to meet all additional housing need*

Option H:

Locating development in particular settlements where it could help fund projects

Public money to fund infrastructure is in short supply. Sometimes the only way that big scale improvements or expansions can be paid for is through development. By the community taking housing development, the council and county council can require housebuilders to contribute towards infrastructure projects. These could be, for example, a new road, a new river bridge, or a new or expanded school. The scale of growth to fund such 'big ticket' items is likely to be quite large, but we would like to know if there are any communities which would welcome investigation of this option. Another route for communities to look at enhanced growth to fund a 'big ticket' project is through preparing a neighbourhood plan.

Pros

- *Would achieve much needed benefits for some communities*
- *Fits well with neighbourhood planning where communities weigh up for themselves whether to opt for this*

cons

- *May require significant amounts of housing to achieve the benefit sought."*

The outcome of consultation on the Issues and Scope in relation to settlements and housing was:

- Many respondents favoured those options which put new housing in parts of the district other than where they live;
- Strong comments that Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford had already seen large allocations through the Core Strategy which could change the nature of the towns;
- Strong feeling that Green Belt should be protected, especially directly adjoining edge of Oxford. Some counter-comments (often, but not always, from developers or landowners) that this would be a sustainable location for a large number of houses, especially in terms of meeting unmet housing need from Oxford;
- Strong feeling that housing should be located near to employment sites and areas (though sometimes this seemed to be a basis for people elsewhere in the district arguing that development should be directed to Didcot and Science Vale);

The Publication Local Plan's spatial strategy responds to these responses by continuing to focus development on our sustainable settlement which includes both Towns and Larger

Villages, and this means that the concern about concentrations of growth solely upon our Towns can be alleviated. The strategy also includes strategic allocations on Green Belt land, including on the edge of Oxford, which is an approach that is likely to be supported by a number of development sector respondents and others. The principal elements of the Local Plan's strategy has continued to be a focus on Science Vale and sustainable settlements.

Economy

The Issues and Scope then asked 'How many new jobs should we plan for?' and asked two questions:

"Which of these ideas would you support?"

"Where should new employment areas be sited?"

"A successful economy is vital to maintain the quality of life of South Oxfordshire's residents.

We want to help our existing local businesses and embrace being part of the new fast growing opportunities in Science Vale. This area is so important that by being positive about growth we can contribute to innovation and help the national economy. In 2011 we had around 65,000 jobs in South Oxfordshire, it is predicted that there will be around 76,500 jobs by the end of the plan period in 2031.

In the Core Strategy we have already identified that we should allocate an additional 20 hectares of land for employment uses. This includes 6.5 hectares in Science Vale at Didcot and intensification of uses at Culham Science centre. The remainder includes some additional land at Thame and Wallingford and in the larger villages. Changes in planning regulations make it easier for commercial buildings to be converted to new homes without the need for planning permission. This means we are likely to lose employment land.

We need to consider how much additional provision we should make and where this should be. The Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire prepared by our Local Enterprise Partnership seeks to drive accelerated economic growth and put Oxfordshire at the forefront of the UK's growth ambitions.

We have recently agreed a city deal to assist with our growth ambitions, this will create 18,600 new jobs in the county by investment in new innovation and incubation centres, investment in support for small and medium sized businesses, accelerating the building of new homes, investment in new transport schemes including the Science Transit (a guided bus) and provision of apprenticeships."

The Issues and scope consultation then asked:

“Should we identify further land to:

- *foster jobs growth in Science Vale?*
- *focus more jobs on existing employment areas and towns?*
- *steer larger businesses to accessible locations?*
- *make provision for small businesses in the rural areas?*
- *resist pressure for the loss of employment buildings and land to other uses (although a lot of change will no longer be controlled through planning because of government changes to permitted development rights - should we use article 4 directions to protect employment land/buildings in certain locations from change of use to residential?)”*

The outcome of the Issues and Scope consultation in relation to economy was as follows:

- Most responses suggested close to existing towns, this includes; Oxford, Reading, Didcot, Thame, Henley and Wallingford.
- A significant number suggested Science Vale.
- Some suggested close to housing, and close to existing employment areas.
- Some suggested employment should be spread across the district to enable agricultural diversification, a few suggested where there is business demand and gave support for home working and protecting existing employment sites.
- A significant number of respondents were concerned to ensure that employment is located in accessible locations, close to transport corridors, where infrastructure (particularly high-speed broadband), amenities and transport are available and where cycling and walking are possible.
- There were a number of comments about where not to put new employment land, these include; avoiding long distance commuting, avoiding unacceptable traffic impacts, not in the Green Belt, away from existing high employment areas, not in market towns and villages or close to heritage assets.
- A small number of responses suggested economic growth should be elsewhere in the country.

The Publication Local Plan (January 2019) and its spatial strategy continue to focus development in Science Vale and sustainable settlements. Each town includes employment allocations and jobs growth is facilitated there. Improving the economic prospects of Science Vale remains the principal element of the Plan’s spatial strategy.

Refined Options – February 2015

Overall the Council received 3,215 comments from 750 contributing individuals and organisations during consultation on the refined options.

Strategy

The strategy to deliver the vision was presented as evolution of the current Core Strategy, rather than a radical rewrite, as it was still appropriate and sustainable and reflects valued input from the community. The strategy was set out as follows:

“Our overall strategy for the district is to protect and enhance what is best about South Oxfordshire, whilst supporting economic growth, delivering new homes and promoting healthy and vibrant communities. Our Strategy seeks to promote a network of sustainable settlements across the district to ensure that everybody has access to a basic range of services – it differentiates between towns and villages according to the role they play and the services they provide for our communities.

The Science Vale area, with Didcot at its heart, will continue to be the focus for economic development, investment in infrastructure, and the provision of additional services and community facilities.

We will also continue with the Core Strategy’s delivery of additional housing growth here, which will help to secure investment and improvement in the area. Together with our neighbours Vale of White Horse District council, we are producing an Area Action Plan (AAP) that will plan for and deliver growth in the Science Vale area.

To help meet our need for more homes, we propose providing for some more housing growth in the market towns and larger villages. This will help these places to remain vibrant service centres for our district, providing employment, shops, healthcare and other vital facilities, ensuring that our residents have access to the services they need, and the towns and villages themselves continue to thrive.

In the smaller villages (and perhaps also even in our other smallest settlements) we propose to allow a slightly more flexible approach to growth, through reviewing our existing policies. Where it is supported by local communities, and particularly where they wish to identify development opportunities in neighbourhood plans, being more flexible would help to meet local housing demand and could also help to ensure that shops and services remain viable.

We will continue to work with the other local authorities in Oxfordshire to look at cross boundary issues. When it is clear what the level of unmet need from Oxford is, we will seek to include this in a way that fits into our strategy.

Our strategy in a nutshell is to focus change and development in Science Vale, and elsewhere plan for some smaller-scale change to make sure that our towns and villages remain vibrant

Science Vale is an important location for economic development and investment in infrastructure, and we believe that it should be a focus for housing growth to secure and support this investment. For example, locating growth near to committed road improvements can help fund and deliver them. At the same time, our market towns and largest villages have an important role to play providing jobs and services locally, and these too would probably benefit from having a reasonable share of the additional housing growth. This would help make sure they remain viable and vibrant service centres for the district, and are able to make use of brownfield site opportunities as they come forward for re-use.

We therefore propose that most of our own housing need is allocated to these places.

Over the next few pages we introduce these areas and explain the opportunities in each.

Didcot and Science Vale

Science Vale is already an international location for science and technology businesses. From this strong starting point we need to capitalise on Science Vale's opportunity to provide an even better environment for business to flourish. Our vision for Science Vale in 2031 is grounded in continuing this story of economic success:

Science Vale will consist of thriving communities that have benefited from sustainable growth and the successful delivery of major infrastructure

One of the priorities for Science Vale is to provide an environment in which science led business can flourish. Part of this is ensuring that we have an attractive and diverse housing offer, set in an area with good communications networks, links to university research, 'big science', the space sector and cutting edge technology. Clustering development in one area gives a critical mass of economic, social and cultural activity to support the delivery of infrastructure and sustain vibrant town centres. Although some of the land is in the Oxford Green Belt and some in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, overall Science Vale is less constrained for planning purposes than much of South Oxfordshire. It also has good transport connections by road and rail, with improvements to both already underway. Didcot is only 15 minutes from Oxford city centre by rail on a high frequency service, and rail electrification will bring faster and more frequent services to London; investments in the road and cycle network will make it easier to get to and around Science Vale.

The Science Vale Area Action Plan, that will complement the Local Plan, will help make sure that this is an excellent place to live, by developing vibrant neighbourhoods while

also ensuring our villages and countryside maintain their distinctive character. Here's a taster of our approach for Science Vale:

- *Excellent design embedded throughout Science Vale*
- *A coordinated approach to new development in Science Vale through an urban design framework*
- *Protection for the distinctive character and heritage of Science Vale's market towns, villages and countryside*
- *Didcot transformed into a well serviced and high quality urban hub*
- *New homes to balance the new jobs*
- *Opportunities for people to build their own homes in appropriate locations*
- *A 'step change' in travel choices away from car travel towards public transport, cycling and walking*
- *Didcot's role as a major rail interchange expanded and aspirations for rail services direct from Grove and Wantage*
- *A cycle strategy for Science Vale that enables people to reliably travel between our towns, villages and their jobs by means other than the private car*
- *Improved access onto the A34 and to the M40*
- *Aspirations for Superfast broadband across all of Science Vale by 2031*

Planning for housing growth in Science Vale

Science Vale is an area of growth and positive change and we think that putting part of the additional housing growth in the South Oxfordshire part of it could bring real benefits. However, putting all the additional housing here could mean that other locations in the rest of district miss out on the opportunity to use it to achieve stronger populations, to secure the future of their services and facilities, to build affordable homes and to use developer contributions and the community infrastructure levy to pay for new or expanded infrastructure.

In our Core Strategy, we allocated a large proportion of the housing to Didcot and have 6,300 homes in the pipeline. Through our Issues & Scope consultation and elsewhere, we are aware that there are limited remaining sites available in Didcot which, combined with the time taken to provide necessary infrastructure, means we need to be mindful of how many houses could be delivered around Didcot between now and 2031. We are also continuing to explore ways to enhance the range of services and the quality of place within Didcot so that it can support its growing population. We recognise, however, we

need to continue to make the most of opportunities for mixed use (employment, retail and residential) redevelopment of brownfield land such as the Didcot A former power station site and around the railway station.

*Around **Culham** railway station there is major high-tech employment at Culham Science centre, an industrial estate and pub & hotel. We could plan for a significant number of new homes at Culham near the station and/or on brownfield land at the Culham no. 1 employment site with the potential to serve these with improved public transport to Oxford (just ten minutes away on the train, although with a low frequency service at present) and to plan a new road and bridge across the River Thames to relieve the congestion at Clifton Hampden.*

*At **Berinsfield** there is an existing large village with a good range of facilities (primary school, sports centre, library, children's centre) with good access to Culham Science Centre and Oxford, particularly the Science Park. Planning a significant number of new homes could help bring a secondary school, improved road links and aim to turn around some of the social deprivation that currently exists and rebalance the housing mix in Berinsfield, a large proportion of which was built as council housing and is still in the social rented sector. As well as expanding Berinsfield, there is also scope for re-organising and re-developing some of the business areas and improving views to the lakes.*

Market Towns and Larger Villages outside Science Vale

This section looks at the towns and larger villages outside the Science Vale area. These are: Henley, Thame, Wallingford, Benson, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote.

Our towns and larger villages are the most sustainable places to live, they have the best access to jobs, shops, schools, public transport connections and other services and facilities and have vibrant clubs and community organisations. Our existing strategy in the core Strategy seeks to enhance the vitality of towns and larger villages by allowing for a proportion of housing and employment growth. By maintaining the network of larger service centres we can help ensure that everyone in the district has access to a basic range of services and facilities.

In considering change we need to think about how we can maintain and improve:

- the very important and attractive historic town centres which are valued by residents and are important visitor attractions*
- important views and approaches*
- parking and access to and through village and town centres due to the narrow street patterns*

- *air quality in central areas*
- *the level of services and facilities for residents particularly health and education*
- *the quality of life that people enjoy and that attracts people to these areas*

In the past in many cases we have secured important benefits for communities where new housing has been built:

- *the relocation of noisy and unsightly uses and thereby reductions of heavy traffic*
- *enabling local businesses to grow on better and less constrained sites*
- *new community buildings, facilities, sporting and play areas*
- *improvements to facilities for example schools, water supplies and sewers*
- *a choice of homes for existing residents, including affordable homes*

There are some constraints that limit new building for example flood risk, the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and important nature conservation areas.

In order to plan in a sustainable way we need to find a balance that allows us to make the best of opportunities and to identify appropriate solutions to problems. Previously developed ('brownfield') sites arise over time as needs change. They can help provide sites for the evolution and renewal of areas, removing eyesores and putting land or buildings to new use. Sometimes they are located within towns providing sustainable sites for housing or mixed uses. Others are in the villages or in more rural locations, having been industrial or institutional premises which are no longer needed for those uses. Although most of our allocations in Didcot in the past were on greenfield sites, elsewhere we have been able to deliver a significant proportion of new housing through re-using brownfield sites like Chinnor Cement Works, Fair Mile Hospital in Cholsey and Rycotewood College in Thame. We will continue to prioritise brownfield land where suitable sites become available."

The outcome of the Refined Options consultation on the spatial strategy was as follows:

- The main comments from those who looked favourably on the suggested strategy tended to be that housing growth should primarily be being directed to the places likely to see the greatest employment growth, while many also agreed that some growth spread more widely around the district would support the existing service centres.
- Those who disagreed with the strategic approach set out gave a number of reasons, including that there were too many homes being proposed, that the character of market towns and villages was already being changed [by Core Strategy and previous housing allocations], and that concentrating too much growth within the Science

Vale area ran the risk of producing poorly-designed, poorly-connected, poorly-served estates.

- There was strong support for the idea that the majority of growth should take place in Science Vale.
- A large proportion of consultees agreed that small villages should be included.
- A similar proportion also supported limited development in larger villages but noted that development should be proportional, appropriate and dependant on existing infrastructure.
- The greatest level of support was for development in Didcot.
- However, there were also suggestions that additional growth should be spread amongst the various villages in Science Vale as well as in Didcot, while others felt that the smaller settlements should be protected from any additional growth.
- There was a strong sense, in a number of comments, that the location of housing should be well related to access to employment, services and facilities.
- The most frequently raised response regarding the location of development was that brownfield sites should be used for housing.
- Other common themes were that the location of development should be decided by local people, through Neighbourhood Plans.
- A number of people responded that both Thame and Wallingford should not take any more growth.

In response to the comments above the Publication Local Plan (January 2019) accepts that the areas likely to see economic growth (Science Vale in particular) should be the focus for our housing supply. This can be achieved without any detriment to the areas character and connectivity, and this strategy would enhance infrastructure where it is desperately needed for communities in that area. Smaller villages are no longer required to make a contribution towards offsetting the housing requirement and do not form part of the spatial strategy. There are a number of components of housing supply set out in the Local Plan, including strategic allocation on brownfield sites at Chalgrove airfield and Wheatley. The plan itself, rather than the spatial strategy specifically, places a great deal of emphasis on NDPs being able to allocate their sites for development at a local level. In the local plan Wallingford's commitments already achieve a 15% increase on growth above the level set in the Core Strategy, in response the local plan proposes no additional growth at Wallingford. Thame continues to have slight headroom, where the NDP can be reviewed to allocate additional sites.

Green Belt

The refined options consultation stated that we had begun a study to look at the land within our Green Belt to see how it performs against the purposes of Green Belt. It did not have any further questions to ask about the Green Belt at this stage but proposed to invite

comment on how we will have used the outcome of the study in the next iteration of the Local Plan 2031 consultation.

There was no outcome of the refined options in relation to Green Belt because this element of the consultation was postponed and to be informed by the Green Belt study, although comments were received asking to resist development in the Green Belt.

Housing

The Issues and Scope asked a specific question about housing which is related to how the spatial strategy developed. It stated:

“In our Issues & Scope consultation we presented eight different ways in which we could plan for additional housing in South Oxfordshire. Most of these asked about where in the district new housing could best be located – for example, should we continue with the distribution split we used in the core Strategy, or would dispersing the additional growth across the district make more sense – but we also asked if there were other ways we could plan more effectively, for example by encouraging development on existing sites at higher densities.

The colour coded diagram below shows our thoughts about how aspects of the different options have been developed for this consultation, having considered your comments and the evidence we have gathered so far. Green shows the options which we think could still make a major contribution to planning for housing growth, red those options which we think should largely be discounted.”

Option A: The Core Strategy approach.

There are elements of the Core Strategy distribution that we think are appropriate to retain, such as the identification of the roles and character of different places: Didcot growth point, the market towns, larger villages, smaller villages and other villages.

Option C: All in Science Vale. We are unlikely to pursue this distribution strategy. We are already committed to high levels of growth in and around Didcot and we need to be sure that whatever we additionally plan will be sustainable and deliverable. There are also other places within South Oxfordshire which could benefit from taking some of the additional housing growth (for example, in terms of viability of shops and services), so we would not wish to restrict it to one part of the district.

Option E: Dispersal. This will not form a major part of the distribution of new homes, because spreading development too thinly would not deliver new infrastructure as effectively as the other options. However, allowing some housing in smaller settlements would help to meet local need and could support local services – these would be treated as windfall developments.

Option G: Raising densities. On its own this option is unlikely to deliver the number of additional homes that we are planning for. However, we will always seek to make the most efficient use of land. Some sites' character or location will make them more suited to higher density development.

Option B: Science Vale and 'sustainable settlements.'

This option strongly supports the vision we have set out. It is an evolution of 'Option A' which extends the housing focus of Science Vale beyond Didcot. It also makes clear that we are committed to protecting the most important natural and historic environments in South Oxfordshire; for example in the AONBs, the Green Belt and conservation areas.

Option D: All growth in a single new settlement.

This is unlikely to be the most appropriate way to deliver the identified need for housing in South Oxfordshire or the best way to support communities across the district. However, a new settlement could be a reasonable alternative to consider to plan for the unmet housing need from Oxford City.

Option F: Next to neighbouring major urban areas.

As with 'Option D', this is not likely to be the most appropriate way deliver the new homes required for South Oxfordshire. However, it could help accommodate unmet need from Oxford.

Option H: locating development in settlements where it could help fund projects.

This option would not meet our housing need on its own. However, we will continue to work with communities, especially through neighbourhood planning, to identify places where housing growth could help to deliver local infrastructure projects.

- Many elements of this option still considered appropriate
- Some elements of this option still considered appropriate
- Few elements of this option still considered appropriate

“For our own housing need we think the economic growth potential of Science Vale and the opportunity to support the vitality of the market towns and larger villages make these the most appropriate places for locating most of our additional 3,600 homes We also think that we could introduce more flexibility in the smaller villages, for example by allowing neighbourhood plans to allocate housing sites or allowing larger infill schemes to come forward. This is essentially a combination of green/amber options A, B and E from the Issues and Scope consultation. Options G and H are unlikely to deliver sufficient homes to meet our needs but will be important to add detail to the overall strategy. For

any unmet need from Oxford, we think it would probably be best to ring-fence this growth to one or more large strategic sites (options D and F)."

The outcome of consultation on the refined options in relation to housing was as follows:

- There was strong support for the idea that the majority of growth should take place in Science Vale.
- A large proportion of consultees agreed that small villages should be included.
- A similar proportion also supported limited development in larger villages but noted that development should be proportional, appropriate and dependant on existing infrastructure.

In response to the comments received the Publication Local Plan (January 2019) and its spatial strategy continue to focus development in Science Vale and sustainable settlements. However smaller villages are no longer required to offset the housing supply by identifying housing allocations in neighbourhood plans. Option A 'The Core Strategy approach' remains a relevant aspect of the spatial strategy – The identification of the roles and character of settlements remains and Science Vale is a focus of growth, including Didcot. Option B is the principle focus of growth in the spatial strategy, it relates to some extent to Option A with the science vale focus and promotes growth at sustainable settlements. Option C 'All in Science Vale', whilst laudable its unrealistic and unsustainable to accommodate all development in a single location. Option D 'All growth in a single new settlement', whilst explored through the local plan process it is unrealistic to accommodate the level of housing need for the District in a single location, and it could not be delivered. It could be considered that Culham is a new settlement as it relates only to the science centre rather than any existing settlement, however this allocation does not support all growth. Option E 'dispersal' is only partially relevant to the proposed spatial strategy. Dispersal of some development to larger villages is still be appropriate especially to sustain services and facilities at those settlements, but it will not be possible to achieve a significant growth uplift that could be planned for in a sustainable way on available sites. Option F 'next to neighbouring major urban areas' is a relevant component of the spatial strategy. Option B provides the focus for a large part of the growth for the area, there is no reason why Option F cannot be considered alongside this option, particularly as the major urban areas are highly sustainable settlements in their own right. It would not be relevant to refer to Reading as a location for growth, but it would be relevant for Oxford given unmet need at the City. Option G 'raising densities' remains an important part of the spatial strategy and has necessitated changes to the local plan to optimise the efficient use of land. It is still unlikely to deliver significant growth by implementing this option alone, but given the Local Plans proposed green belt releases this remains an important option to incorporate into the strategy to be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework. Option H is still a relevant component of the spatial strategy. This is linked to Option B as development in science vale has a similar aim of being able to unlock economic growth in this area.

Economy

There were matters related to the economy which are also considerations for the development of the local plans spatial strategy. The refined options stated:

“Our local plan cannot create new or expanded businesses but can try to create an environment where businesses can thrive and want to operate. Our policies for the local economy seek to achieve this aim. In particular we should consider how much land we need and where are the locations that businesses want. The council commissioned a study to look at the amount and potential location of future requirements for employment land. This study identifies a need for between 16 and 25 hectares of additional employment land to 2031. We have already set out broad locations for around 20 hectares of this employment land in the core Strategy. We believe we should seek to provide 25 hectares so will identify locations for an additional 5 hectares.

Between 6 and 7 hectares of the total requirement is needed for offices, with strongest demand likely to be at Culham. There is likely to be some demand in our market towns Henley, Thame and Wallingford. Some demand could also be met in Didcot which has not previously been a popular office location. This study supports our allocation of a substantial amount of floorspace at Culham Science Centre and suggests that the remainder should be allocated in the Didcot Station area and Monument Business Park in Chalgrove with the residual floorspace provided as smaller flexible offices in our market town centres.

Between 10.5 and 17.7 hectares of the total requirement is needed for industry and warehousing, the main areas of demand are in Science Vale, at Culham and Didcot. Wallingford and Thame are also relatively popular areas.

We have already made allocations at Culham Science Centre, Didcot, Thame and Wallingford. Monument Business Park at Chalgrove would appear to be the most suitable location for employment land in the rural areas and possibly has capacity for more than the 4.2 hectares we have suggested. Culham Science Centre has further capacity, within the existing site, but further road improvements would be necessary to expand employment there. The Didcot Station area would also be a suitable central location in Didcot.”

The outcome of the refined options consultation in relation to the economy was as follows:

- There was a general view that housing and employment provision should be provided in close proximity.
- There was also a strong theme that employment should be provided in locations with good public transport connections, good road connections and with good parking.
- There was general support for the locations suggested in the Refined Options consultation, which were Monument Business Park, Culham Science Centre, Didcot Station area, the market towns and also some support for all employment to be in Science Vale.

- There was some support for smaller business premises across the district, home working and conversion of agricultural premises.

All of these elements of feedback have been considered and incorporated into the Local Plan Publication version (January 2019).

Preferred Options – June 2016

During the consultation on the preferred options version of the Local Plan the Council received 7,988 individual comments from 1371 respondents.

Spatial Strategy

The Preferred Options Local Plan spatial strategy was set out as follows:

“We have updated our spatial strategy previously set out in the Core Strategy, to ensure that we meet our housing needs requirement in full. The revised strategy sets out how we will deliver the vision and objectives.

The Plan seeks to meet housing needs identified for South Oxfordshire as well as a contribution towards our neighbour, Oxford city’s unmet housing need. At present a joint programme with the other Oxfordshire authorities is progressing work on the scale of Oxford’s unmet needs and how those could be met. The outcome of this work is expected in September 2016.

This Preferred Options consultation proposes to make provision for 15,750 homes to meet the identified housing need for South Oxfordshire over the plan period (2011 to 2032), this equates to 750 homes per annum. This reflects the committed economic growth housing requirement for our district identified in the SHMA and falls within the Objectively assessed need (OAN) range.

Under the Duty to cooperate we have worked closely with all the authorities in Oxfordshire to identify the scale of unmet need and how Oxford’s housing requirement could be distributed across the county. The outcome of the Oxfordshire Growth Board’s work is expected in September 2016 so we have decided to include a provisional allocation for Oxford’s needs in this Preferred Options document. We currently propose to make provision for an additional 3,750 homes as a working assumption to help meet the housing needs of Oxford city.

The Preferred Options also make provision for at least 19.5 hectares of employment land and appropriate levels of retail development in our four towns.

The majority of the allocations made in the Core Strategy are retained and new allocations are made to meet the additional housing requirements identified in the SHMA.

The strategy has been updated to help address the key challenges facing the district now and to make best use of available opportunities. Our strategy will deliver sustainable development supporting the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in national policy.

At the Refined Options stage we set out eight potential options for our housing distribution that we could apply. In response to your comments and further analysis, we have combined options: broadly retained Option a (the core Strategy approach), and incorporated elements of Option B (Science Vale and ‘Sustainable Settlements’) and Option D (all growth in a new settlement).

Our preferred strategy supports the delivery of new housing and economic growth and translates our vision and objectives to:

- support a strong network of vibrant settlements including the regeneration of town centres, enhancing the district’s sustainability and self-sufficiency, recognising the rural nature of South Oxfordshire and the impact of the nearby major centres of Oxford and Reading*
- support a movement strategy that strengthens connections to key places and allows a choice of transport modes and manages traffic to improve environmental quality*
- create thriving local economies in urban and rural areas with a range of work opportunities including more high value jobs and enable the upskilling of our workforce to support existing and new firms*
- deliver sufficient new homes of the right types and tenure to meet the needs of our communities and economy supported by excellent infrastructure, services and facilities*
- maintain and enhance the built and natural environment and ensure good quality developments and change.*

Housing supply

We have developed a range of housing supply to help provide a choice and to maximise housing delivery across the plan period. These include:

- Retained Core Strategy allocations*
- Strategic allocations made in this plan*
- Neighbourhood Plan allocations for smaller scale sites*

- *Infill in our settlements that will come forward through the development management process in accordance with the policies in this plan, known as windfalls*
- *Existing planning commitments*

Although we will rely on Neighbourhood Plans to deliver a major part of our housing supply, the strategic allocations are central to the delivery of the Local Plan 2032 and to the achievement of our objectives. We followed a comprehensive selection process to identify the proposed strategic sites. This began with an assessment of land surrounding Oxford and Reading, land submitted as potential locations for a new settlement and land adjoining our key employment area at Culham Science Centre. This helped us identify the most suitable and sustainable broad locations that were then comprehensively tested through our Sustainability Appraisal and other evidence assessments. The scale of development on strategic sites will enable infrastructure improvements that offer benefits to their local areas.

Our proposed strategic policy is as follows:

Proposed Policy - The Overall Strategy

Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire should be consistent with the overall strategy of:

- *retaining Didcot/Science Vale as a focus for major new development so that this area can play an enhanced role in providing town centre improvements, homes, jobs and services with improved transport connectivity*
- *providing for major development at Chalgrove Airfield, including necessary infrastructure and community facilities*
- *supporting the roles of Henley, Thame and Wallingford by maintaining and improving the attractiveness of their town centres through measures that include environmental improvements and mixed-use developments and by providing new homes, jobs, services and infrastructure*
- *supporting and enhancing the roles of the larger villages of Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres*
- *supporting smaller villages by allowing limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services*
- *protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that*

outside towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment

- *working closely with partner agencies, local authorities, communities, neighbourhood Plans groups and other stakeholders to ensure the comprehensive and timely delivery of our strategy*

Understanding the nature of our towns and villages and how they inter-relate and link with places outside the district is vital. Movement patterns are complex and vary with the purpose of the journey. Some key services such as main hospitals and regional shopping centres will continue to be provided outside the district, particularly in Oxford and Reading.

The strategy can influence how services and employment are accessed and where new development is located within the district. It can support and influence where and how service providers deliver their services and encourage different and improved ways of delivery.

South Oxfordshire has around 140 settlements, although some are just isolated groups of houses with no community facilities. We looked at these against a range of criteria such as employment opportunities, schools, health services, recreation and leisure opportunities, shops, accessibility and population to prepare a settlement assessment and hierarchy. The settlement hierarchy is set out in appendix 2. Our strategy reflects the status of settlements in this assessment.”

The outcome of the preferred options consultation in relation to the spatial strategy was as follows:

- Support and objection to focusing on building on, or near to Green Belt land;
- Respondents wanted to see more housing and employment opportunities in Didcot and Science Vale;
- There was a feeling that the potential strategy would destroy existing communities and that other sites, specifically Grenoble Road, should be developed instead.
- Build less in the rural villages;
- It was felt that existing villages should be grown and enhanced and that the strategy does not meet SODC’s objective of maintaining existing rural communities.

The response to this outcome in the Publication Local Plan (January 2019) and its spatial strategy is to recognise that smaller villages should not be expected to contribute towards offsetting the Districts housing requirement. The Plan, and its strategy demonstrates that Green Belt land is needed to facilitate development to meet the housing need of the District and Oxford City.

Second Preferred Options – April 2017

During the consultation on the second preferred options version of the Local Plan the Council received 7,666 comments from 1,369 contributing consultees.

The Strategy

The second preferred options local plan stated the following with regards to the spatial strategy:

“Historically, growth in South Oxfordshire has been largely focussed upon Didcot and the market towns of Thames, Wallingford and Henley on Thames. Other than Wallingford, these towns are located towards the boundary of our District and the continued focus on the periphery of the District has led to a reduction in development to support the investment in services and infrastructure within the heart of South Oxfordshire.

The issues and options version of the Local Plan presented a series of potential options for the distribution of development within the District.

- i) Core Strategy approach*
- ii) Science vale and “sustainable settlements’*
- iii) All in Science Vale*
- iv) All in single new settlement*
- v) Dispersal*
- vi) Next to neighbouring major urban areas (Reading/Oxford)*
- vii) Raising densities (from 25dph)*
- viii) Locating development in settlements where it could help fund projects.*

Each of these options have been consulted upon and tested through the Sustainability Appraisal work. The preferred option for the council is a blend of some of these options rather than favouring any one scenario in isolation. The strategy draws together the core Strategy approach with development at Science Vale. It is also complemented by the identification of new settlements and the location of development to fund regeneration. Drawing on a combined approach to the distribution of new housing development enables a series of benefits to be delivered through the Local Plan.

Our preferred strategy supports the delivery of new housing and economic growth and translates our vision and objectives under inter-related spatial themes to:

- Support a strong network of vibrant settlements including the regeneration of town centres, making the whole District more sustainable, recognising the rural nature of South Oxfordshire and the impact of nearby major centres*

- *Support a movement strategy that strengthens connections to key places and enables initiatives to prosper, allows a choice of transport modes and manages traffic to improve environmental quality*
- *Create a thriving economy in urban and rural areas with a range of work opportunities including more high value jobs and enable the up-skilling of our workforce to support existing and new firms*
- *Deliver sufficient new homes to meet the needs of our communities and economy supported by appropriate infrastructure, services and facilities*
- *Maintain and enhance the built and natural environment and ensure good quality developments and change.*

The Local Plan seeks to build upon the existing settlement hierarchy and actively create a pattern of development central to the area. It identifies strategic levels of growth at three locations connecting through the central area of the District at Culham, Chalgrove and Berinsfield.

***Strengthening the heart of South Oxfordshire
Policy STRAT1 The Overall Strategy***

Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire should be consistent with the overall strategy of:

- ***Focusing major new development in Science Vale including Didcot Garden Town and Culham so that this area can play an enhanced role in providing homes, jobs and services with improved transport connectivity***
- ***Providing for major development at Chalgrove and Berinsfield, including necessary infrastructure and community facilities***
- ***Supporting and enhancing the economic and social dependencies between our towns and villages***
- ***Supporting the roles of Henley, Thame and Wallingford by maintaining and improving the attractiveness of their town centres through measures that include environmental improvements and mixed-use developments and by providing new homes, jobs, services and infrastructure***
- ***Supporting and enhancing the roles of the larger villages Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres***
- ***Supporting other villages by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services***

• Protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the AONBs and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment.

Understanding the nature of our towns and villages and how they interrelate and link with places outside the District is a vital part of our strategy. Movement patterns are complex and vary with the purpose of the journey. Some key services such as main hospitals and regional shopping centres will continue to be provided outside the District, particularly in Oxford and Reading.

The strategy can influence how services and employment are accessed and where new development is located within the District. It can support and influence where and how service providers deliver their services and encourage different and improved ways of delivery.

South Oxfordshire has around 140 settlements, although some are just isolated groups of houses with no community facilities. These vary considerably in size and character reflecting their natural setting and historical development. The settlements in the District have been categorised by the services and facilities they offer and a hierarchy of policies has been established on this basis. We looked at these against a range of criteria on employment opportunities, schools, health services, recreation and leisure opportunities, shops accessibility and population to prepare a settlement assessment and hierarchy³. Villages have been categorised as being either “larger villages”, with a wide range of services and facilities in sustainable locations, and “smaller villages” that have a more limited range of services. There is a clear distinction between the villages in the settlement hierarchy but will be directing development through this plan to the most sustainable locations. We are directing development to the larger villages to support the spatial strategy and will support those Neighbourhood Development Plan groups who wish to promote development in the smaller villages. In addition, there are “other villages” which lie at the bottom of the settlement hierarchy, being hamlets or very small settlements with very limited or no services. Our strategy reflects the status of settlements in this assessment.

Our vision and objectives for South Oxfordshire recognise the rural nature of our District and the importance of our rural settlements in contributing to what makes South Oxfordshire such a beautiful and prosperous place to live. Our strategy for the Local Plan is to continue to ensure that all our communities thrive and that everyone has access to services within a short distance. This is achieved through our network of settlements and the settlement hierarchy, which ensures development takes place within the more sustainable locations of the District.

The outcome of the second preferred options consultation in relation to the spatial strategy was as follows:

- The scale of the spatial strategy attracted comments. Some respondents suggested that it was too grand and questioned its sustainability, whilst others argued there was greater capacity, in the district, for change and the strategy did not plan for enough growth.
- A number of concerns were raised about maintaining the character of the district.
- Some respondents questioned whether the overall strategy was appropriate for meeting Oxford's needs (and generally this was in the context of whether to build in the Green Belt) and siting homes near jobs;
- The continued focus on growth in Science Vale and Didcot was generally supported, although some respondents felt that there was an over reliance on Didcot to deliver a significant amount of the housing need in the district;
- The settlement hierarchy was generally supported, and the roles of market towns and larger villages as service centres at different scales was recognised;
- Additional strategic sites may need to be included in the plan to ensure sufficient land to meet the housing targets.

The response to these comments in the Publication Local Plan (January 2019) and its spatial strategy is to provide additional strategic allocations. However the focus on science vale and sustainable settlements is prevalent as supported, but Didcot allocations that exist from the previous Core Strategy are rolled forward for their contribution towards offsetting the housing requirements for this Local Plan.

Publication Version – October 2017

During the consultation on the Publication Version of the Local Plan the Council received 2,590 individual comments from 686 respondents.

Our Spatial Strategy

The First Publication Local Plan (October 2017) set out the following spatial strategy:

“The Local Plan updates the spatial strategy set out in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy adopted in December 2012, to ensure that we meet the requirement set out in national policy to meet our housing needs. the strategy sets out how we will deliver the vision and objectives set out in chapter 3. It identifies the roles that Science Vale, including Didcot Garden town and Culham, the market towns, the villages and the countryside will play in the future. It shows where new homes will be built, where opportunities to provide new jobs will be created, and where infrastructure and services will be required. It shows how we will work in partnership to deliver the strategy with those responsible for key services, including healthcare, education, transport, water supply and community safety and with others such as affordable housing providers.

Local planning authorities have a responsibility to plan positively and work collaboratively. We cannot plan in isolation, and South Oxfordshire has been working with, and continues to work with the other Oxfordshire authorities, supported by the Oxfordshire Growth board, Local enterprise Partnership, key stakeholders, our parish and town councils and infrastructure providers.

The plan seeks to meet needs identified for South Oxfordshire as well as some of the needs arising from our neighbour Oxford city. At present a joint work programme with the other Oxfordshire authorities² is still progressing on the scale of Oxford city's unmet needs and how they can best be met.

All allocations made in the Core Strategy are retained and new allocations are made to meet additional housing requirements identified in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market assessment (SHMA) 2014. The strategy has been updated to help address the key challenges facing the district now and to make best use of available opportunities.

Significant weight is attached to ensuring our strategy delivers sustainable development, supporting the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in national policy.

The Strategy

4.6 Historically, growth in South Oxfordshire has been largely focussed upon Didcot and the market towns of Thame, Wallingford and Henley-on-Thames. Other than Wallingford, these towns are located towards the boundary of our District and the continued focus on the periphery of the district has led to a reduction in development to support the investment in services and infrastructure within the heart of South Oxfordshire.

4.7 The issues and options version of the Local Plan presented a series of potential options for the distribution of development within the district.

a) Core Strategy approach

b) Science Vale and 'sustainable settlements'

c) All in Science Vale

d) All in single new settlement

e) Dispersal

f) Next to neighbouring major urban areas (Reading/Oxford)

g) Raising densities (from 25dph)

h) Locating development in settlements where it could help fund projects.

4.8 Each of these options have been consulted upon and tested through the Sustainability appraisal. the preferred option for the council is a blend of some of these options rather than favouring any one scenario in isolation. The strategy draws together the Core Strategy approach with development at Science Vale. It is also complemented by the identification of new settlements and the location of development to fund regeneration. Drawing on a combined approach to the distribution of new housing development enables a series of benefits to be delivered through the Local Plan.

4.9 Our preferred strategy supports the delivery of new housing and economic growth and translates our vision and objectives under inter-related spatial themes to:

- Support a strong network of vibrant settlements including the regeneration of town centres, making the whole District more sustainable, recognising the rural nature of South Oxfordshire and the impact of nearby major centres*
- Support a movement strategy that strengthens connections to key places and enables initiatives to prosper, allows a choice of transport modes and manages traffic to improve environmental quality*
- Create a thriving economy in urban and rural areas with a range of work opportunities including more high value jobs and enable the up-skilling of our workforce to support existing and new businesses*
- Deliver sufficient new homes to meet the needs of our communities and economy supported by appropriate infrastructure, services and facilities*
- Maintain and enhance the built, historic and natural environment and ensure good quality developments and change.*

4.10 the Local Plan seeks to build upon the existing settlement hierarchy and actively create a pattern of development central to the area. It identifies strategic levels of growth at four locations connecting through the central area of the District at Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Culham and Wheatley.

Strengthening the heart of South Oxfordshire

Policy STRAT1: The Overall Strategy

Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire will be assessed using national policy and guidance and the whole of the development plan* and should be consistent with the overall strategy of:

- Focusing major new development in Science Vale including Didcot Garden town and Culham so that this area can play an enhanced role in providing homes, jobs and services with improved transport connectivity***

- **Providing for major development at Chalgrove and Berinsfield, including necessary infrastructure and community facilities**
- **Supporting and enhancing the economic and social dependencies between our towns and villages**
- **Supporting the roles of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford by maintaining and improving the attractiveness of their town centres through measures that include environmental improvements and mixed-use developments and by providing new homes, jobs, services and infrastructure**
- **Supporting and enhancing the roles of the larger villages of Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring-on-Thames, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres**
- **Supporting smaller and other villages by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services**
- **Protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the two AONB and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside of the towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment**
- **Support and enhance our historic environment.**

**the development plan is outlined in paragraph 1.17*

this policy contributes towards achieving objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7.

4.11 Understanding the nature of our towns and villages and how they interrelate and link with places outside the district is a vital part of our strategy. Movement patterns are complex and vary with the purpose of the journey. Some key services such as main hospitals and regional shopping centres will continue to be provided outside the district, particularly in Oxford and Reading.

4.12 The strategy can influence how services and employment are accessed and where new development is located within the district. It can support and influence where and how service providers deliver their services and encourage different and improved ways of delivery.

4.13 South Oxfordshire has around 140 settlements, although some are just isolated groups of houses with no community facilities. These vary considerably in size and character reflecting their natural setting and historical development. The settlements in the district have been categorised by the services and facilities they offer and a hierarchy of policies has been established on this basis. We looked at these against a range of criteria on employment opportunities, schools, health services, recreation and leisure opportunities, shops

accessibility and population to prepare a settlement assessment and hierarchy³. Villages have been categorised as being either “larger villages”, with a wide range of services and facilities in sustainable locations, or “smaller villages” that have a more limited range of services. there is a clear distinction between the villages in the settlement hierarchy but we will be directing development through this plan to the most sustainable locations. We are directing development to the larger villages to support the spatial strategy and will support those neighbourhood Development Plan groups who wish to promote development in the smaller villages. In addition, there are “other villages” which lie at the bottom of the settlement hierarchy, being hamlets or very small settlements with very limited or no services. Our strategy reflects the status of settlements in this assessment.

4.14 Our vision and objectives for South Oxfordshire recognise the rural nature of our District and the importance of our rural settlements in contributing to what makes South Oxfordshire such a beautiful and prosperous place to live. Our strategy for the Local Plan is to continue to ensure that all our communities thrive and that everyone has access to services within a short distance. this is achieved through our network of settlements and the settlement hierarchy, which ensures development takes place within the more sustainable locations of the district.

Meeting our housing and employment needs

4.21 We commissioned a study, referred to as the employment Land review, which assesses the amount and potential location of future requirements for employment land. this study identifies a need for between 33.2 and 35.9 hectares of employment land. We have identified broad locations for this:

- i) at Culham Science centre and the adjacent strategic site;
- ii) at Didcot, albeit with some in the Vale of White Horse;
- iii) at the strategic sites in Berinsfield and Chalgrove;
- iv) at the towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford to be identified in NDP; and
- v) at Crowmarsh Gifford and supported employment locations at the other larger villages to be identified in NDP.

4.22 In order to allow employment opportunities to flourish, this plan will identify a provision for at least 35.9 hectares of employment land over the plan period, including the safeguarding of around 11.5 hectares of employment land, carried forward from the core Strategy. there is more detail on this in chapter six.

4.23 The overall strategy (policy Strat1) supports a range of development opportunities at different scales and types of settlements and sites. Some development sites will be easier to deliver than others. Any large-scale development site will be more challenging to prepare for development and serve with appropriate infrastructure. This challenge will be engaged with and reflected in our infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) and this plan’s supporting development

trajectory. We also recognise that some of our ambitious plans will continue to deliver after 2033 so land will be identified in this plan that may also continue to be built out after this plan period. Further detail of when and how this development will be delivered is given in the housing and employment chapters

Wider Housing Market area

4.24 Oxford city council has identified that it will have difficulty in meeting its own identified housing needs and has asked the other Oxfordshire authorities to assist in the provision of housing. South Oxfordshire District council has worked closely with all the authorities in Oxfordshire under the Duty to cooperate to identify the scale of unmet need and how Oxford city's housing requirement should be distributed across the county.

4.25 The preparation of the Oxford city Local Plan is at a relatively early stage and adoption is not anticipated until 2019. At this point in time, it is not possible to accurately identify the precise extent of Oxford city's unmet need. The SHMA recommends a range of 24,000 – 32,000 new homes for Oxford city. there exists a working assumption that the unmet housing need for the city is 15,000 new homes. this figure was chosen by the Oxfordshire Growth board to facilitate the distribution of Oxford's unmet need. this is to be shared between the remaining four districts.

4.26 The South Oxfordshire Local Plan makes provision for additional homes to help meet Oxford city's needs. This provision will be added to our own needs and be met in a way that supports our spatial strategy. In line with the other Oxfordshire authorities we propose a stepped development trajectory that begins provision for the city's unmet needs in the monitoring year 2021/22. The housing and employment chapters provide further detail about when and where development will occur.

4.27 We will continue to work with the other districts in the Housing Market area to support and plan for unmet housing needs and other strategic matters, recognising the different stages of plan making which have been reached.

4.28 It is recognised that there is significant uncertainty regarding the precise level of unmet need which Oxford city may find on the conclusion and adoption of their own Local Plan. We will review our Local Plan once Oxford city have adopted their plan to address their examined unmet need and ensure that our plan responds positively to this. We consider that this is the most appropriate and responsible manner in which to plan for additional homes until the full extent is known.”

The outcome of the first Publication Local Plan consultation in relation to the spatial strategy was as follows:

- The proposed spatial strategy is unsustainable, with the focus on development within the “heart of the district” and within larger villages and market towns a particular cause for concern
- The strategy should focus development on urban extensions to Oxford and Reading or within developments within commuting distance to those settlements.
- All sustainable settlements should grow with development being proportional to the facilities, services and infrastructure on offer, together with their functional links to higher order service centres and neighbouring settlements, in order to help to sustain existing facilities and services;
- There is an over-reliance on strategic allocations;
- The smaller developments at remote sites should be discouraged if they are not on the public transport network;
- The supply of sites identified in the Plan seeks only to address the strategy to strengthen the existing settlement hierarchy within South Oxfordshire.

In response to these comments the Publication Local Plan (January 2019) makes it clear that the principal aim of the spatial strategy is to promote growth at Science Vale and sustainable settlements and this includes larger villages and market and other towns to enhance their function and the sustainability of those places. Smaller villages are no longer expected to make a contribution towards offsetting the housing requirement of the District. There are also now additional strategic allocations around the edge of Oxford which responds to the sustainability of those locations. The supply of housing in the local plan exceed 28k, around 10k of these are on strategic allocations made by this local plan, this is not considered to be an over-reliance.

Recommended Spatial Strategy

The process of reviewing the potential strategic allocations for the emerging Local Plan is set out in the Council's [Site Assessment Background Paper](#).

This review has led to conclusions about the potential strategic allocations for the Local Plan to allocate. However it has highlighted that there are some concerns with these larger sites within the Plan period, and that the Local Plan's spatial strategy needed to be updated to reflect the review conclusions and the recommended strategic allocations for the Local Plan.

However, no changes to the Local Plan's currently proposed Strategic Objectives were deemed to be necessary (See Appendix 1 Evolution of Local Plan Objectives).

The key areas of required change to the Spatial Strategy included:

- Clarity within the Spatial Strategy about which of the spatial strategy options considered by the Council will deliver more significant growth and those which have an important but contributory role;
- Removal of unnecessary reference to 'strengthening the heart of the District' to Policy STRAT 1, so that this policy sits within the correct context of the spatial strategy rather than focussing upon one element of that strategy that applies to some strategic allocations to a greater extent than others;
- Policy STRAT 1 The Overall Strategy - Update the references to all strategic allocations;
- Policy STRAT 1 The Overall Strategy – Include reference to the additional amount of housing to contribute towards Oxford city's unmet housing needs; and that their needs can be met on those sites allocated adjacent to Oxford city and provide reference to the links to Science Vale and the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine;
- Policy STRAT 1 The Overall Strategy – Update references to Green Belt release in exceptional circumstances and ensure the Plan provides for long term protection of the Green Belt within the District;
- Policy STRAT 1 The Overall Strategy - Include reference to delivery and pace of development within our strategic allocations;
- Suggest edge of Oxford sites are an ideal location to support the City's unmet housing needs in addition to the delivery of other complementary elements of the Council's strategy such as raising densities;
- Release of Green Belt land will require greater consideration of making efficient use of land that we are proposing to allocate;
- Terminology changes to account for changes to the National Planning Policy Framework that were introduced since the First Publication version Local Plan.

- Updates to references to the review of the Local Plan to deal with the outstanding amount of Oxford city's unmet needs and include reference to JSSP/Oxfordshire Plan;
- Update to the Local Plan period that the spatial strategy relates to, so that it ends in 2034 rather than 2033;
- Clarification wording to be suggested for 'The Strategy for Science Vale' so that it reflects the amended spatial strategy and what the Local Plan aims to achieve;
- Removal of unnecessary reference to 'strengthening the heart of the District' to Policy STRAT 5 Strategic Development, so that this policy sits within the correct context of the spatial strategy rather than focussing upon one element of that strategy that applies to some strategic allocations to a greater extent than others;
- Greater detail to be provided to Policy STRAT 5 Strategic Development so that the findings of the Background Paper can be translated to all proposed strategic allocation policies;
- Add references to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

Appendix 1 - Evolution of Local Plan Objectives

	Preferred Options	Second Preferred Options	Publication Local Plan
Objective 1 – Settlements			
OBJ 1.1	Support the settlement hierarchy, the development of Didcot Garden Town, the growth of our towns and the vitality of our villages.	Support the settlement hierarchy, the growth and development of Didcot Garden Town, the delivery of new development in the heart of the District , the growth of our market towns and the vitality of our villages.	Support the settlement hierarchy, the growth and development of Didcot Garden town, the delivery of new development in the heart of the district, the growth of our market towns and the vitality of our villages.
OBJ 1.2	Support rural communities and their way of life, recognising that this is what attracts people to the district.	Support rural communities and “their way of life’, recognising that this is what attracts people to the District .	Support rural communities and “their way of life’, recognising that this is what attracts people to the District.
OBJ 1.3	Meet identified housing needs by delivering high-quality, sustainable, attractive places for people to live and work.	Meet identified housing needs by delivering high-quality, sustainable, attractive places for people to live and work.	Meet identified housing needs by delivering high-quality, sustainable, attractive places for people to live and work.
OB 1.4	Focus growth in Science Vale through delivering homes and jobs, retail and leisure facilities and enhanced transport infrastructure.	Focus growth in Science Vale through delivering homes and jobs, retail and leisure facilities and enhanced transport infrastructure.	Focus growth in Science Vale through delivering homes and jobs, retail and leisure facilities and enhanced transport infrastructure.
Objective 2 – Housing			
OBJ 2.1	Deliver a wide range of housing options to cater for the housing needs of our community (including self-build, starter homes and older person’s accommodation).	Deliver a wide range of housing options to cater for the housing needs of our community (self-build, older person’s accommodation).	2.1 Deliver a wide range of housing options to cater for the housing needs of our community (including self-build and older person’s accommodation).

OBJ 2.2	Support the regeneration of housing and facilities to strengthen communities, and address identified poverty and social exclusion.	Support the regeneration of housing and facilities to strengthen communities, and address identified poverty and social exclusion.	Support the regeneration of housing and facilities to strengthen communities and address identified poverty and social exclusion.
OBJ 2.3	contribute to meeting the economic and housing needs of the county as a whole, reflecting the special character of South Oxfordshire	Support meeting the economic and housing needs of the county as a whole, reflecting the special character of South Oxfordshire.	Support meeting the economic and housing needs of the county as a whole, reflecting the special character of South Oxfordshire.
Objective 3 – economy			
OBJ 3.1	Improve employment opportunities and employment land provision, providing high quality local jobs to help retain more of its skilled residents in the local workforce.	Improve employment opportunities and employment land provision, providing high quality local jobs to help retain more of its skilled residents in the local workforce.	Improve employment opportunities and employment land provision, providing high quality local jobs to help retain more skilled residents in the local workforce.
OBJ 3.2	Support business growth, especially in locations close to existing business areas, transport connections and broadband provision and provide the opportunity to reduce commuting distances.	Support business growth, especially in locations close to existing business areas, transport connections and broadband provision and which provide the opportunity to reduce commuting distances.	Support business growth, especially in locations close to existing business areas, transport connections and broadband provision and which provide the opportunity to reduce commuting distances.
OBJ 3.3	Ensure economic and housing growth are balanced and facilitate sustainable journeys to work.	Ensure economic and housing growth are balanced, to support sustainable journeys to work.	Ensure economic and housing growth are balanced, to support sustainable journeys to work, recognising that we cannot determine where people work –some of whom will choose to travel to employment locations beyond our district, such as London, reading and Oxford.
OBJ 3.4	Give emphasis to high-technology industries whilst supporting the retail and service sectors.	Support the retail and service sectors as well as low and high-tech industries.	Support the retail and service sectors as well as low and high-tech industries.

OBJ 3.4	create the conditions whereby world-renowned and cutting edge industries choose to locate and grow their businesses here, contributing to a strong and successful economy, in line with the Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire (SEP).	create the conditions whereby world-renowned and cutting edge industries choose to locate and grow their businesses here, contributing to a strong and successful economy, in line with the Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire.	create the conditions whereby world-renowned and cutting edge industries choose to locate and grow their businesses here, contributing to a strong and successful economy, in line with the Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire.
OBJ 3.6	Inspire the next generation of workers by planning for high quality education facilities.	Inspire the next generation of workers by planning for high quality education facilities.	Inspire the next generation of workers by planning for high quality education facilities.
OBJ 3.7	Encourage tourism by protecting our built and natural assets, such as the Thames, and providing services and facilities for visitors	Encourage tourism by protecting our built and natural assets, such as the Thames, and providing services and facilities for visitors.	Encourage tourism by protecting our built and natural assets, such as the Thames, and providing services and facilities for visitors.
Objective 4 – Infrastructure			
Obj 4.1	Ensure that essential infrastructure is delivered to support our existing residents and services as well as growth.	Ensure that essential infrastructure is delivered to support our existing residents and services as well as growth.	Ensure that essential infrastructure is delivered to support our existing residents and services as well as growth.
Obj 4.2	Make sustainable transport an attractive and viable choice for people, whilst recognising that car travel and parking provision will continue to be important in this rural district.	Make sustainable transport an attractive and viable choice for people, whilst recognising that car travel and parking provision will continue to be important in this rural District.	Make sustainable transport, walking and cycling an attractive and viable choice for people, whilst recognising that car travel and parking provision will continue to be important in this rural District.
Objective 5 – Design			
OBJ 5.1	Deliver high quality, innovative, well designed and locally distinctive developments in sustainable locations.	Deliver high quality, innovative, well designed and locally distinctive developments in sustainable locations.	Deliver high quality, innovative, well designed and locally distinctive developments in sustainable locations in accordance with the South Oxfordshire Design Guide.

OBJ 5.2	Support development that respects the scale and character of our towns and villages, enhancing the special character of our historic settlements and the surrounding countryside	Support development that respects the scale and character of our towns and villages, enhancing the special character of our historic settlements and the surrounding countryside.	Support development that respects the scale and character of our towns and villages, enhancing the special character of our historic settlements and the surrounding countryside.
Objective 6 – community			
OBJ 6.1	champion neighbourhood planning, empowering local communities to direct development within their area and provide support to ensure neighbourhood Plans are deliverable, achievable and sustainable.	champion neighbourhood planning, empowering local communities to direct development within their area and provide support to ensure neighbourhood Development Plans are deliverable, achievable and sustainable.	champion neighbourhood planning, empowering local communities to direct development within their area and provide support to ensure neighbourhood Development Plans are deliverable, achievable and sustainable.
OBJ 6.2	Provide access to high quality leisure, recreation, cultural, community and health facilities.	Provide access to high quality leisure, recreation, cultural, community and health facilities.	Provide access to high quality leisure, recreation, cultural, community and health facilities.
OBJ 6.3	Ensure all communities have access to the services and facilities they value, supporting the health and wellbeing of everyone	Ensure all communities have access to the services and facilities they value, supporting the health and wellbeing of everyone.	Ensure all communities have access to the services and facilities they value, supporting access to sport and recreation and the health and wellbeing of everyone.
Objective 7 - Natural and built environment			
OBJ 7.1	Protect and enhance the natural environment, including biodiversity, the landscape, green infrastructure and our waterways, placing particular importance on the value of the Oxford Green Belt, our two areas of Outstanding natural Beauty and the River Thames.	Protect and enhance the natural environment, including biodiversity, the landscape, green infrastructure and our waterways, placing particular importance on the value of the Oxford Green Belt, our two areas of Outstanding natural Beauty and the River Thames.	Protect and enhance the natural environment, including biodiversity, the landscape, green infrastructure and our waterways, placing particular importance on the value of the Oxford Green belt, our two areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the River Thames.

OBJ 7.2	conserve and enhance our rich and varied historic assets and their settings, celebrating these as some of our strongest attributes.	conserve and enhance our rich and varied historic assets and their settings, celebrating these as some of our strongest attributes.	conserve and enhance our rich and varied historic assets and their settings, celebrating these as some of our strongest attributes.
Objective 8 - climate change			
OBJ 8.1	Minimise carbon emissions and other pollution such as water, air, noise and light, and increase our resilience to the likely impact of climate change, especially flooding.	Minimise carbon emissions and other pollution such as water, air, noise and light, and increase our resilience to the likely impact of climate change, especially flooding.	Minimise carbon emissions and other pollution such as water, air, noise and light, and increase our resilience to the likely impact of climate change, especially flooding.

