

# South Oxfordshire LOCAL PLAN 2031

## ISSUES AND SCOPE CONSULTATION CONSULTATION REPORT

FEBRUARY 2015



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South Oxfordshire

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**South Oxfordshire District Council  
Local Plan 2031 Issues & Scope  
Consultation**

**Consultation Report  
February 2015**



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## Executive Summary

### BACKGROUND

In June 2014 we published our “Local Plan 2031 – Issues & Scope” consultation document. This was the first step in creating a new Local Plan for the district, and it set out a number of issues which the new plan would need to address.

Foremost among these was the need for the district to plan for a higher level of housing than in the existing Core Strategy, which had been adopted in December 2012, but we also asked questions about a range of other matters including planning for jobs, how we could improve our town centres, where and how we should look to improve transport in the district, and how we can accommodate travelling communities.

The original consultation document is still available from the council’s website via this link:

[http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-06-05\\_SODC%20LP2031%20ISSUES%20&%20OPTIONS%20DOCUMENT%20final.pdf](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-06-05_SODC%20LP2031%20ISSUES%20&%20OPTIONS%20DOCUMENT%20final.pdf)

The consultation period ran from 11 June to 23 July, and as well as publishing the report online we held a number of events with groups including four focus groups with disabled groups and four workshops with school groups – see “How we consulted” on page 10 for more details.

### THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Overall we received 3944 comments from 771 individuals and organisations. This report summarises the main themes which came back to us from the consultation. Note that we have not attempted to deal with every specific comment raised in a point-by-point manner – this is not necessary or appropriate at this stage of preparing the Local Plan, where we are trying to understand broad issues and identify the major concerns across the district.

Key points emerging from the consultation are as follows:

#### ***General***

- Almost 4,000 comments from nearly 800 respondents
- Workshops held with staff, councillors, schools, and parish & town councils

#### ***Vision***

- Existing vision supported by a slim majority (52%:48%)
- Criticism included that it is too broad and vague, that it does not lead to deliverable and achievable objectives, and that it is too weighted towards economic growth.
- Praise included that it seemed reasonable and sensible.

### ***Level of growth***

- Negative comments on SHMA figures for various reasons (“unrealistic”, needs to be tested, and based on potential economic growth).
- Strongest support for “planned economic growth plus affordable housing uplift” (825 p.a.), least favour for “full affordable housing” level (965 p.a.),
- Also strong support for continuing with Core Strategy numbers

### ***Views on accommodating highest level of housing need***

- Strong concerns about infrastructure – including transport, education, healthcare and utilities. Mentions also for concerns about flood risk, ecology, landscape and air quality.
- Further negative comments on SHMA, often drawing on CPRE response.
- Some comments that we should plan for full OAN, and a small number of suggestions that we should be planning for full affordable need and Oxford unmet need.

### ***Housing Options***

- 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 Core Strategy which could change 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 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).
- Further negative comments on SHMA.

### ***Neighbourhood Plans***

- Need for clarity and guidance on issues which can be covered by Neighbourhood Plans.
- Concern at impact of new Local Plan (and especially higher housing figures) on existing Neighbourhood Plans (and those currently being prepared).

### ***Oxford's housing need***

- Many respondents felt that Oxford should be accommodating more housing within its own boundaries – e.g. by using sites earmarked for commercial development, and using some undeveloped green space within the city (e.g. sports facilities).
- Specific sites or areas mentioned, most often (though not always) by those with some development interest – e.g. Grenoble Road – although these were strongly opposed as well.
- Some support for a new settlement or garden city to meet unmet need from Oxford.

## ***Green Belt***

- Generally very strong support for retaining Green Belt, usually without any sort of review.
- Some support for reviewing Green Belt – as previously, Grenoble Road is contentious. Also mentioned were Culham (Science Centre and No. 1 Site), and around Wheatley.

## ***Planning for new jobs***

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.

## ***How should our town centres change***

- Strong support for providing adequate amounts of free car parking, and creating additional car parks. Better enforcement also suggested though, as congestion and parking causing problems (especially in Henley).
- Strong desire to see independent retailers supported, including support for farmers' markets.
- Support for completion of Orchard Centre Phase 2 in Didcot.
- Suggestion that town centres should be made more accessible to the elderly – not everyone has the internet or wishes to shop online.
- Need to treat each town differently – not a “one size fits all” approach.

## ***Transport***

- Better cycle and pedestrian routes, especially off-road cycle links between settlements and major employment locations.
- General support for green technology – e.g. electric car charging points. Low-emission buses – but some scepticism also.
- Poor quality of public transport and road surfaces often mentioned.
- Thames crossings an issue – near Reading and around Culham/Clifton Hampden



## ***Travelling communities***

- Some feeling that we should not be providing any further sites.
- Brownfield sites suggested, including Didcot Power Station, Worminghall Airfield [both lying outside South Oxfordshire], and expanding existing traveller sites.

### **NEXT STEPS**

We will use the responses to this consultation to refine our vision and strategy for South Oxfordshire, and we are carrying out further consultation on the new Local Plan – what we are calling a “Refined Options” consultation – in February and March 2015.

We have updated our Local Development Scheme to reflect the fact that our overall Local Plan timetable has been extended to take account of planning for unmet housing need from the City of Oxford. We are also updating our Statement of Community Involvement, to reflect the lessons learned from this and other consultations, and to ensure that we continue to reach people in efficient and effective ways.

All the comments received on the Issues & Scope consultation can be viewed on the council’s website at

<https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/south/planning/pol/lp2031/is/lp>.

General information about the new Local Plan, including further consultation documents and supporting studies, will be published on the council’s website at

[www.southoxon.gov.uk/newlocalplan](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/newlocalplan).

## Introduction

In June 2014 we published our “Local Plan 2031 – Issues and Scope” consultation document<sup>1</sup>. This was the first step in creating a new Local Plan for the district, and it set out a number of issues which the new plan would need to address. Foremost among these was the need for the district to plan for a higher level of housing than in the existing Core Strategy, which had been adopted in December 2012, but we also asked questions about a range of other matters including planning for jobs, how we could improve our town centres, where and how we should look to improve transport in the district, and how we can accommodate travelling communities.

In this report we go through the Issues and Scope consultation document question by question and set out the main issues which were raised by respondents. We have not given a response to each individual comment you made – at this stage of preparing the new plan we wanted to tap into local knowledge to identify issues of interest and your thoughts on how we could shape our new plan. You can see all of the submitted comments can be seen on the council’s consultation website at <https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/south/planning/pol/lp2031/is/lp>.

We have used the comments on this consultation, along with information from a range of studies we have carried out or commissioned, to narrow down the options for the new Local Plan. Our “Refined Options” consultation in February and March 2015 will show how the approach to preparing the new Local Plan 2031 is being shaped by the information you’ve helped provide, and we will again be asking for your views on how we move towards more detailed proposals later in 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> The original consultation document is available from the council’s website: [http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-06-05\\_SODC%20LP2031%20ISSUES%20&%20OPTIONS%20DOCUMENT%20final.pdf](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-06-05_SODC%20LP2031%20ISSUES%20&%20OPTIONS%20DOCUMENT%20final.pdf)

## How we consulted

The consultation took place from **11 June to 23 July 2014**, a period of six weeks. We also informally extended the consultation, so that responses received up to 30 July were accepted and processed, following requests from parish councils and councillors who needed extra time to consider the questions.

We tried to ensure that we reached a wide spread of our community with our Issues & Scope consultation. The table below provide a breakdown of the approaches used for the consultation. This consultation stage has also involved maintaining the partnership working arrangements we have identified with our larger villages, established with work on the earlier Local Plan Part Two. We have also looked at new ways of consulting and promoting through the use of social media – the Local Plan 2031 Issues & Scope consultation saw us produce the first South Oxfordshire planning policy YouTube video.

We exceeded the statutory consultation requirements for this stage of consultation. Our consultation methods are documented and broken down as follows:

### *Statutory methods*

- Formal press adverts to trigger start of consultation
- Website – information promoted on council’s website
- Letters and emails notification to statutory consultees
- Letters and emails to non statutory consultees on our database
- Documents and information available at council offices and libraries and one stop shops across the district.

### *Non-statutory methods*

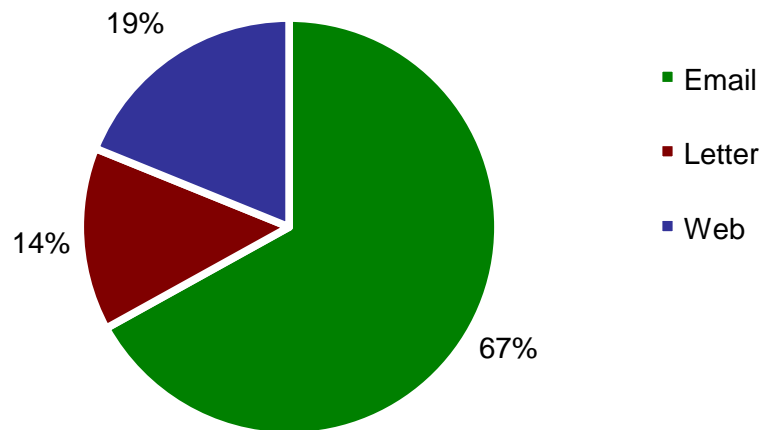
- Press release to local media outlets
- Twitter feeds – promoting the consultation
- Parish newsletter articles – to promote consultation within local parish newsletters
- Internal articles in council’s newsletter In focus
- Consultation portal/online survey – using consultation system to improve responding options
- Councillor workshops for member involvement
- Staff workshops for staff involvement
- Two town, parish and neighbourhood planning group briefings – to assist dialogue with local communities
- Consultation posters/leaflets – with assisted distribution through town and parish councils to promote consultation
- Consultation banners – distributed at council offices, libraries and one stop shops and leisure centres under district council control, to help promote consultation.
- Focus groups – with disabled groups, to target hard to reach groups (working with the South Oxfordshire Disability Panel, Didcot Access Group, Mobility Issues Group Wallingford and Mobility Issues Group Goring
- Workshops – with young people, to target hard to reach groups (working with Wallingford School, Wheatley Park School, Lord Williams’s School and Didcot Girls’ School).

- YouTube consultation video – to promote the consultation in an alternative format and widen distribution.

## Response to the consultation

In total we received 3944 comments from 771 contributing consultees. This represented a significant increase from previous consultations – we received around twice as many comments from a third more contributors than for the Local Plan Part 2 Sites and General Policies document in 2013.

The responses were received from an increased percentage of people directly responding using our consultation system. The overall breakdown of responses was:



**Figure 1: Methods used to respond to the consultation**

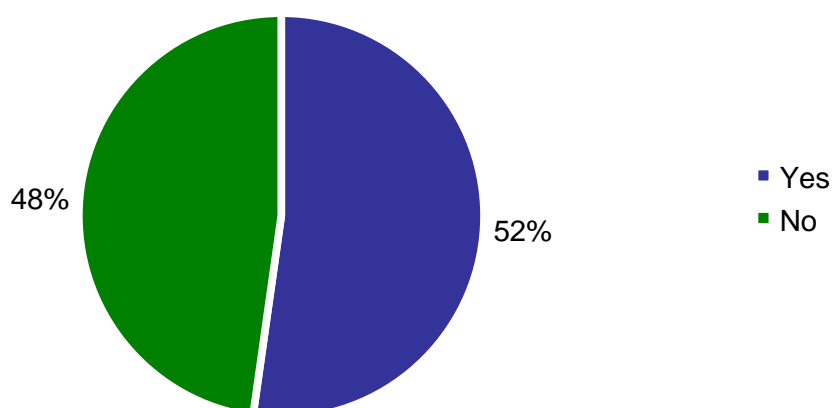
The council's first Planning Policy YouTube video received approximately 330 views, which help promote the consultation.

## Responses to consultation questions

### OUR VISION

#### Q1 – “Do you support [the existing Core Strategy] vision<sup>2</sup> for the district?”

We asked this as a simple yes/no question; a slim majority of those responding said that they did support the existing vision:



**Figure 2: Support for the existing Core Strategy vision**

(302 responses)

#### Q2 – “What suggestions do you have for improving the vision?”

The reasonable level of support for the existing vision was reflected in the fact that we received a number of comments to the effect that it was “sensible”, “concise and useful”, and that there was “no reason why [it] should be changed”.

However, as might be expected, there were rather more comments which were not supportive. Sweeping negative responses included that it covered too many themes and was merely an optimistic wish list (one respondent went so far as to suggest that it might be a “blueprint for a socialist utopia”), and that it was neither visionary nor sufficiently measurable or realisable.

Among specific suggestions made as to how the vision could be changed, the most common was that we should give greater prominence to the protection and enhancement of the district’s countryside and natural environment, while there was also some support for us seeking to ensure that housing growth and employment growth were linked and located close to each other. We will set out in the Refined Options consultation how we think the Vision could be amended to reflect these comments.

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<sup>2</sup> The Core Strategy vision can be found in Section 3 (page 21) of the Adopted Core Strategy document, which is available online here: [http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2013-05-01%20Core%20Strategy%20for%20Website%20final\\_0.pdf](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2013-05-01%20Core%20Strategy%20for%20Website%20final_0.pdf)

## HOW MANY NEW HOMES DO WE NEED TO PROVIDE?

### **Q3 – “Which level of growth do you think we should plan for, and why?”**

This question was addressed by almost 280 respondents, who made more than 600 individual points covering a wide variety of topics.

The most common subject for discussion was the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), with more than 80 comments dealing with the subject. The overwhelming majority of these were negative, with the most frequent comment being that the housing need identified in the SHMA is too high. This was followed by comments that the study should be subject to testing, and concerns that the housing need is not realistic as the SHMA is based on potential but unknown economic growth.

The Issues & Scope consultation document set out a range of possible housing growth numbers drawn from the SHMA. The “planned economic growth plus affordable housing uplift” number of homes (825 houses per year) was most favourably discussed within 54 positive responses, while the option with the fewest positive comments (21) was meeting our full affordable housing need (965 houses per year). Affordable housing was raised by many; the most frequent comments were that affordable housing is greatly needed but currently in short supply, and that an increase in housing figures may help in the delivery of affordable housing – on the whole the view was that affordable housing is necessary and should be provided. Two negative comments were made on affordable housing; that the accuracy of the affordable housing numbers within the SHMA should be reconsidered, and that increasing housing supply will not, on the whole, increase affordability.

Many respondents suggested that we should be planning to put most new housing close to areas where economic development is proposed, so that the need to commute is reduced.

Environmental concerns cropped up quite frequently, the most common points being made were that developing land is irreversible, and that even planning for the same number of homes as in our Core Strategy will be detrimental to the environment. Most of the respondents who mentioned the environment were of the view that we should be putting the conservation of the environment above the provision of housing. A very small number of comments suggested the opposite; that there are no significant environmental constraints within the district which would prevent us planning for SHMA levels of housing growth.

Several responses raised infrastructure as a concern. These particularly related to the current level of infrastructure provision (especially transport) being unsuitable for more housing. A small number of respondents were concerned that infrastructure and facilities required must be sustainable and should be delivered ahead of housing growth, and a couple of people suggested that there are no infrastructure constraints to development within the district.

Our Refined Options consultation will set out more information, and ask further questions, about the level of growth we should plan for in South Oxfordshire.

## CONSTRAINTS TO HOUSING GROWTH

### **Q4 – “Do you have information or views about why we can or cannot accommodate the highest level of housing need?”**

This question received a fair amount of attention – 260 respondents answered this question, making more than 500 specific comments. The largest area of concern, prompting over 80 comments, was the level of infrastructure available to support any further growth. Comments included references to transport issues – road and car parking capacity in particular – school and doctors’ surgery capacity, and utilities’ ability to cope with the demands of additional housing, especially for water supply and sewerage. 10 comments simply suggested that the numbers presented were too high.

A number of comments made reference to the impact on the natural environment. Flood risk (21), ecological constraints (14), the landscape and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (13) and air quality (8) were all mentioned as important factors to consider. The potential impact on the general character of the district (17) received a number of comments and specifically the Green Belt and Grenoble road (20) were of concern. 12 comments highlighted the appropriateness of a Green Belt review as part of the process for understanding the capacity for development in the district.

There were calls to consider Brownfield land as a priority for growth locations (5) and that agricultural land should be protected (6). The general affordability of housing was also a concern for some (6). There was a broad view, included in 14 responses, which was put forward to suggest a balanced and sustainable approach should be taken to planning for any required growth.

The SHMA itself was the focus for a number of respondents. 46 comments questioned the validity of the study and its methodology, 6 of these were either directly related to the challenge from the CPRE or quoted from it. 11 comments directly questioned the employment projection figures.

In contrast to those questioning the SHMA, 29 respondents stated that it was imperative that the council plan for the full objectively assessed need. Some of these went further to say that the affordability figure of 965 a year should be planned for and that it was vital to also include the unmet need from Oxford city.

While many respondents to this question dealt with reasons why we could not or should not meet the highest level of housing need, there were some who commented that much of South Oxfordshire was free of (especially) environmental constraints; 31 respondents stated that there was sufficient and significant capacity to meet the full Objectively Assessed Need in South Oxfordshire.

As for question 3, we will further questions about the appropriate level of growth for South Oxfordshire in our Refined Options consultation.

## WHICH ARE THE MOST SUSTAINABLE SETTLEMENTS?

### **Q5 – “Do you think we need to change the settlement assessment and settlement hierarchy, and if so what changes should we make?”**

This question prompted around 180 responses, with the most frequent comment being that the settlement assessment and hierarchy used for the Core Strategy did not need to be changed (around 30 responses, including that they were “intelligently thought-out” or “sensible”).

The most popular suggested change was that we should weight the criteria in the assessment – some respondents went further and suggested specific criteria (notably schools, transport connections and doctor) which should be given more prominence. A few respondents suggested additional criteria which could be considered, including a settlement’s potential capacity to accommodate housing and job growth, while others thought that the assessment should also factor in constraints such as flood risk and impact of AONBs. Connections were mentioned by some respondents – both the need to factor in real-life travel times or distances (for example, the limited number of Thames crossing points means that the “as the crow fly” distances we have used bear little resemblance to reality in some cases), and the suggestion that we should also be using accessibility to higher-order employment and service centres (especially Oxford and Reading) as part of the assessment.

Several respondents suggested that we should be grouping criteria thematically – e.g. education, public transport, shops, community facilities – and giving a higher rating to settlements with services across more categories.

As far as the impact of the assessment and hierarchy on our towns and villages, there was generally very little complaint about the designation given in the Core Strategy, though there was some concern about the housing allocations which followed from this (sometimes from residents of the market towns who thought their town had been allocated too much growth), and sometimes from those who thought that the distinctions in policy between the large villages and small villages were too strict for something which may have been decided by the presence or absence of a couple of facilities.

Our Refined Options consultation will not suggest changes to the way we have assessed our settlement hierarchy.

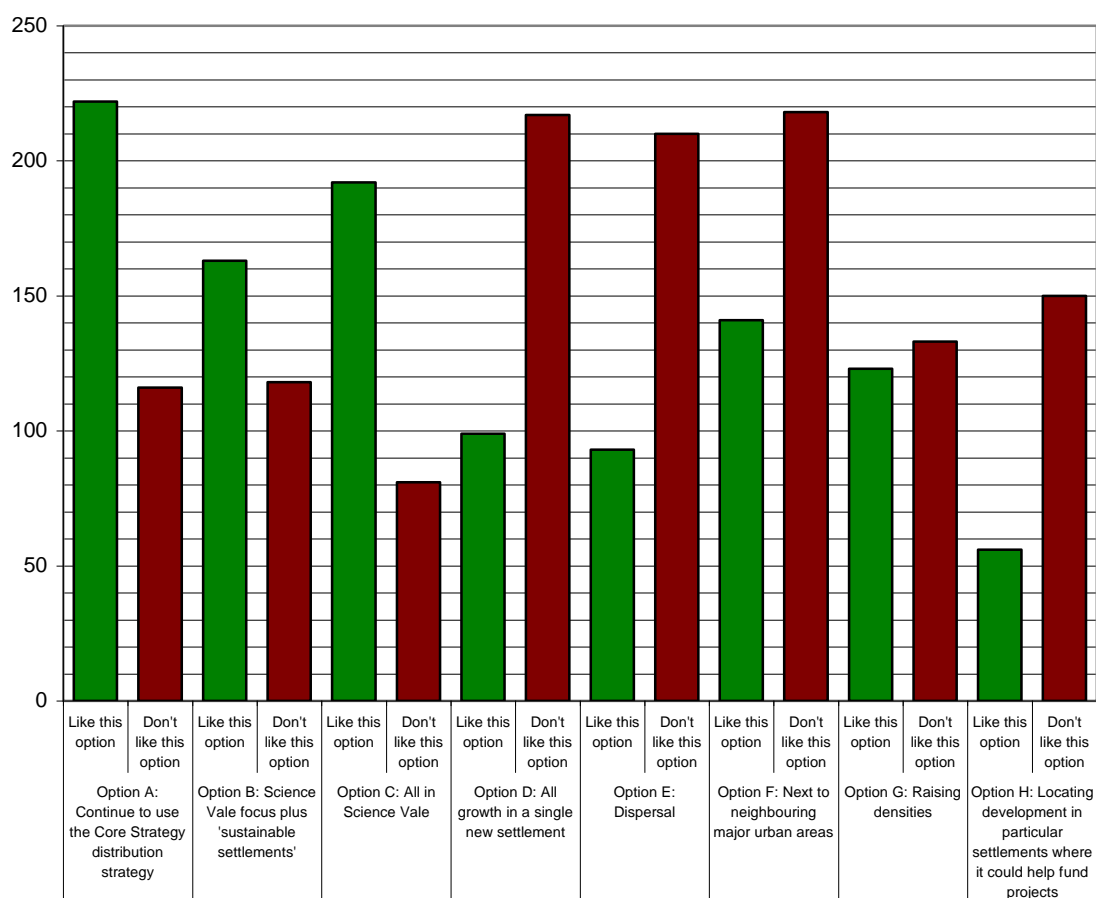


## WHERE SHOULD THE NEW HOUSING GO?

### Q6 – Housing Options

We presented eight different options, each representing a different approach to housing distribution. Although we suggested that the actual solution would come from a combination of some or all of these options (or indeed other suggestions), we wanted to get views about the different types of approach we might take.

We asked respondents to let us know if they liked or disliked any of the options. We did not make any restrictions, so it was possible to select any number of the options. The responses are shown below:



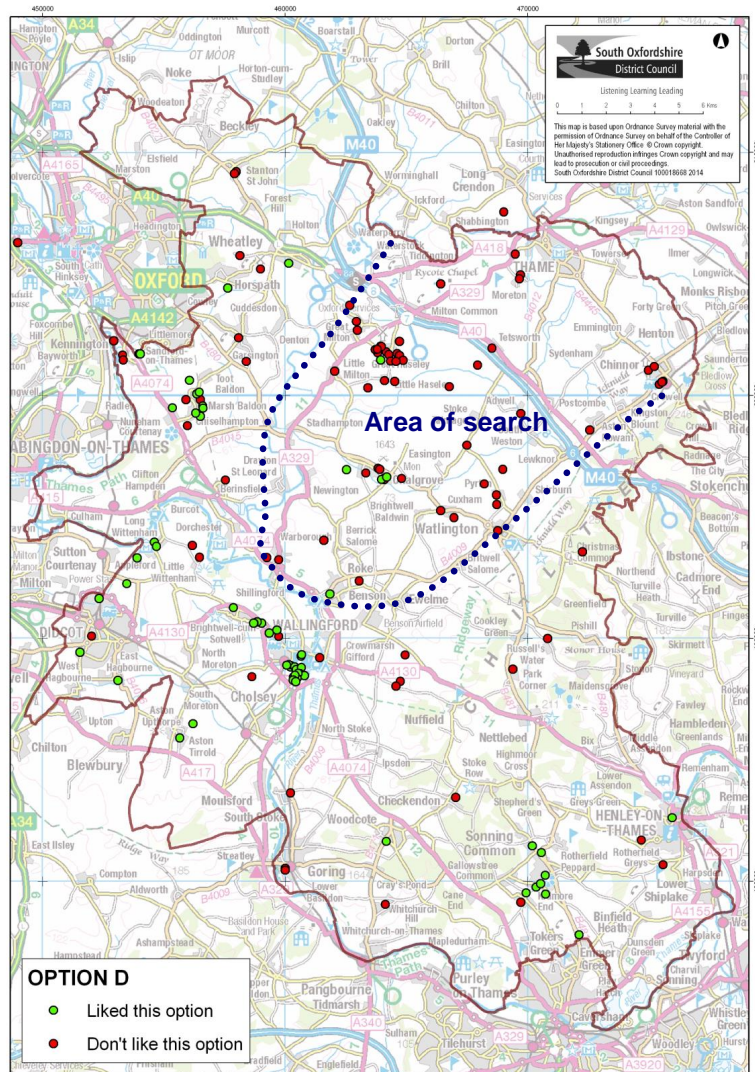
**Figure 3: Responses to Question 6 "Housing Options"**

The housing distribution option with the greatest number of respondents saying that they liked it was "A" – to continue to use the Core Strategy distribution strategy.

The option with the greatest number of responses saying that they did not like it was "F" – building next to neighbouring major urban areas – closely followed by "D" (growth in a new settlement) and Option E (dispersal throughout the district).

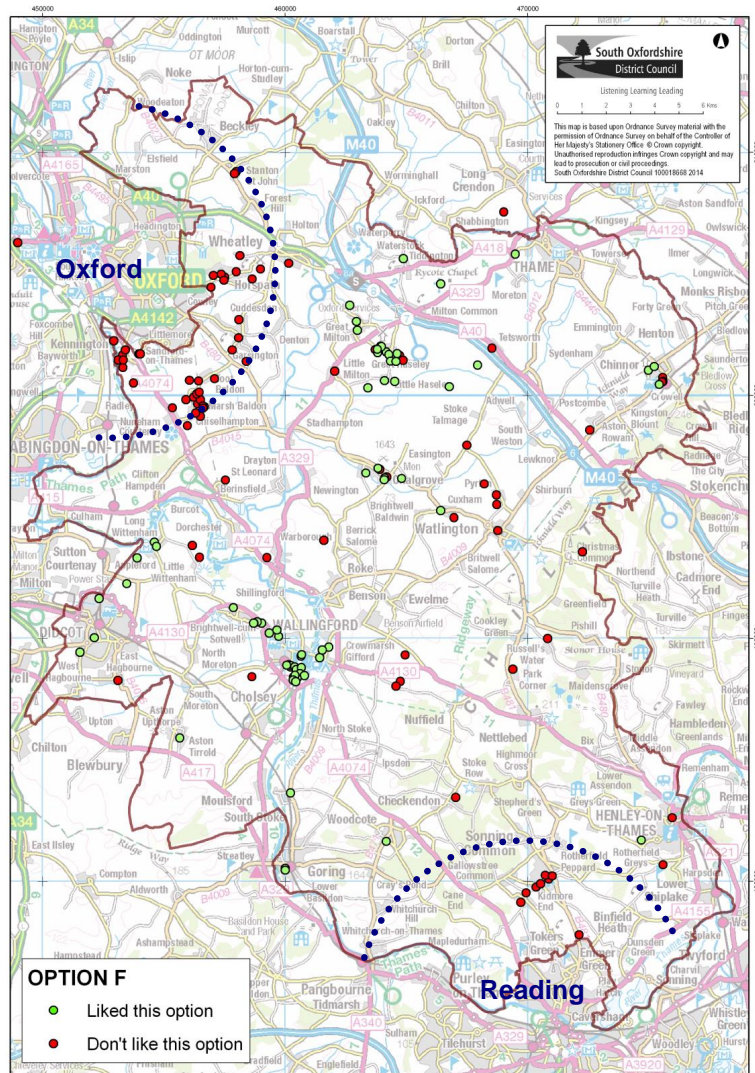
We also looked at where responses came from – although we did not have post code data for all respondents, we were able to use the information we have to look at patterns in responses. This revealed a strong tendency for many

respondents to “like” those options which put additional housing furthest away from them, and to “dislike” the options which could mean additional housing nearer to them. A couple of examples illustrate this particularly well.



**Figure 4: Location of like/dislike responses for Option D (new settlement)**

Option D suggested that a new settlement could be developed in the north-eastern area of the district, between the Oxford Green Belt and the Chilterns AONB. The approximate “area of search” identified in the Issues & Scope consultation document is shown in Figure 4 above, as are the like and dislike responses for this option.



**Figure 5: Location of like/dislike responses for Option F (next to neighbouring urban areas)**

Option F would see housing growth located at the edges of Oxford or Reading. Figure 5 shows the like and dislike responses prompted by this option, where we have postcode data. Oxford and Reading are both highlighted, and the negative response to this option from those people who live closest is obvious.

Similar maps showing the distribution of responses for all eight options are included in Appendix 1.

**Q6a – “Tell us what you like or don’t like about the options, and where you think we should plan the housing?”**

**Q6b – “Is there a better option you could suggest?”**

There was little difference between how most respondents dealt with the two parts of this question, so they are treated together here. Overall, these two questions prompted over 650 individual replies (500 for Q6a).

Respondents generally took on these questions in three different ways – firstly, by responding to the options as set out in the consultation document; secondly, by raising issues relevant to specific localities; and thirdly, by identifying other issues for us to consider.

Many of the responses could simplistically be broken down into two opposing camps. A great many came from residents and other groups who do not wish to see development either in a particular part of the district, in a particular village or on a particular site. A smaller number – but often with much more lengthy argument and justification – came from those with particular sites or development-related business activities to promote. It is not surprising that each of these groups tended to support the options which would best meet their particular aim of preventing or securing development (the maps produced above in the answers to Question 6 (page 17) go some way towards showing the first of these tendencies in particular). That said, the consultation responses provide us with some useful information which will help us refine the housing distribution options, and the main issues raised are summarised here. The Refined Options consultation will explain which elements of the Issues and Scope distributions we think could be carried forward, and we will ask further questions about how housing allocations could be distributed to different places within South Oxfordshire.

### ***The housing options***

#### *Option A – Continue to use the Core Strategy distribution strategy*

Over 100 comments were broadly supportive of the housing distribution strategy established in the Core Strategy, although a sizeable minority of these were from people also suggesting that we should continue to plan for Core Strategy housing numbers. Among positive comments about this approach were that it continued with a strategy which had relatively recently been tested at examination, and that it would continue to locate growth at the towns and larger villages where there are already services and facilities to support residents. There were several comments to the effect that this approach would best preserve the district’s rural nature and protect the smallest villages. A lot of people responded that they supported continuing with this approach but did not explain why.

There were around 50 negative comments about this approach, including that it was unfair (in particular to Didcot and the three market towns, on the basis that they were taking the lion’s share of Core Strategy housing, and should not be expected to take most of the additional growth as well) – the risk of market saturation, especially in Didcot, was also raised a number of times. Other comments included that this approach would assume that towns and villages identified in the Core Strategy would have the ability to accommodate more

housing, while a number of respondents suggested that although the Core Strategy's approach was broadly acceptable it could be improved (for example, by setting out a less-restrictive policy on infill development).

#### *Option B – Science Vale and “sustainable settlements”*

There were over 70 comments which were broadly supportive of this approach. Reasons included that “it focuses housing where it is of most benefit for economic development”, that it “respects the Green Belt and AONB”, and that, as well as supporting Science Vale, it would be directing housing growth to the settlements best-placed to cope with it.

Negative responses numbered around 25, with some comments made to the effect that (as with Option A) this would be an unfair approach, in that it put additional housing growth in those places which already had to accommodate the most Core Strategy growth.

#### *Option C – All in Science Vale*

There were over 100 positive responses towards the idea of developing in Science Vale, although in the comments (as opposed to the like/dislike choice of Question 6) it was not always possible to separate these out from respondents' thoughts on Option B. Reasons given for supporting this option included that Science Vale is an “area of proven growth potential outside the Green Belt and AONB”, and that building homes here could minimise the need to travel to work.

There were around 40 negative comments on this option, including that putting all the housing in Science Vale was not realistic, that it “misses positive opportunities” elsewhere in the district, and that it was unfair and extreme, particularly in terms of its impact on Didcot.

#### *Option D – New settlement*

There were over 50 positive comments on this option, although many included provisos that a new settlement would need massive investment in transport and infrastructure connections, and even then might not be well integrated with the rest of South Oxfordshire. A few respondents suggested that it would be an acceptable way of accommodating a large number of homes in one place without eating into either Green Belt or the AONB.

The positive responses were outweighed by the nearly 80 negative responses to this option. Comments included that it would become a commuter hub for Oxford and London, and that the area of search we had identified was in the wrong place for supporting local economic growth. One respondent suggested that although a new settlement might be acceptable in principle, we should be looking towards putting it in the Science Vale area.

### *Option E – Dispersal*

Although this option received a high negative vote in response to the like/dislike choice of question 6, there was room for a more graduated response for questions 6a and 6b, and the comments received were more finely balanced.

There were over 70 positive comments on this approach; reasons for supporting this option included that it would “ensure each community had a fair share of growth”, that as long as sufficient attention was paid to quality of design and planning “new housing will be more easily absorbed by existing communities”, that by providing more housing locally we could “encourage young people back into villages”, that it could support the provision of facilities at smaller settlements, and that providing some smaller or retirement properties would allow existing residents to “downsize” while remaining in the same village – allowing villages to “evolve” was an idea which cropped up a few times.

There were just under 70 negative responses to this option – comments included that the rural character of villages could be lost, that many smaller villages do not have the infrastructure (public transport in particular) for this to be a sustainable option, and one respondent suggested that it was the “worst of all worlds”, as most small villages would suffer increased traffic and deterioration of services without there ever being a compensatory improvement in infrastructure. A fear of villages growing uncontrollably and merging into each other was mentioned a couple of times.

### *Option F – next to neighbouring urban areas*

This option prompted a largely negative response, with around 130 comments against compared to around 40 which raised points in favour. Most of the comments dealt with issues dealing with the edge of Oxford, with fewer relating to the Reading fringe. A smaller number of respondents provided comments dealing with the option in general terms.

The most common theme of the positive comments was that, recognising that a great many people commute out of South Oxfordshire, locating homes closest to where people work would be a sustainable option (especially in terms of being able to provide public transport), and a couple of people suggested that the edge of Oxford would be a sensible place to help tackle the local need for affordable housing.

Foremost among the negative comments was that the Green Belt should be protected (the phrase “at all costs” cropped up a few times). Sometimes this was without further explanation, although many respondents raised concerns about loss of open space and agricultural land, and the risk of their villages becoming joined to or absorbed into Oxford. A few people commented that the Green Belt was doing exactly what it is intended to do – preventing Oxford’s built-up area sprawling into the surrounding areas.

### *Option G – increasing density*

The suggestion that more homes could be accommodated by encouraging higher density development gained some support, with around 70 positive comments against around 20 negative ones.

Positive comments included that this approach could fit with providing appropriate housing for older people and locally-needed affordable starter homes, and that increasing density could be in keeping with the nature of our rural settlements (although the exact opposite view was also put forward). One comment suggested that “well-designed open spaces within a well designed community, with easy access to open amenity land is better than endless toy town houses with individual gardens” Most respondents recognised that raising densities would need to be done as part of a mix of options.

There were not many outright hostile comments to this option, although one respondent suggested that it was really only relevant to urban design in cities and some larger towns; another person suggested that it could lead to increasing building heights which would increase the impact of infill developments on the character of our towns and villages.

### *Option H – helping to fund infrastructure*

This option provoked a small and finely-balanced response – around 20 positive comments and 20 negative ones.

Many of the positive responses came from people who suggested that it could work, but that they did not understand the option enough to be sure. Negative comments included that the cost of major infrastructure developments was likely to be beyond the scope of being funded in this way.

### **Local issues**

There were a number of places where respondents suggested as being either particularly appropriate or inappropriate for development. Predictably, much of this was led either by a desire to promote a particular site (landowners, developers and their agents suggesting appropriate locations) or by a desire to prevent development in a particular place.

The place where most respondents proposed as particularly appropriate for housing development was the edge of Oxford (around 15 responses, with 5 or so – not all of whom are landowners or developers – suggesting Grenoble Road). Apart from those who suggested Science Vale should be the housing focus, Didcot itself was mentioned 8 times, with Benson, Wallingford, Watlington, Wheatley, and the edge of Reading being suggested 4 times. 7 respondents suggested that the City of Oxford should (by various approaches) accommodate more housing, while at least two people proposed that the housing should be directed to the north of England. Neither of these last two locations falls within the scope of the new South Oxfordshire Local Plan. 20 other places within the district – covering villages of all sizes, and a couple of other specific sites, were mentioned once or twice.

The location most often mentioned as being inappropriate for housing development was also the edge of Oxford, with nearly 40 respondents singling this out for particular criticism (and of these, more than half dealt specifically with Grenoble Road). Didcot was again second on the list, with almost 30 negative comments. Wallingford, the edge of Reading, Thame, Sandford-on-Thames and Henley also scored relatively highly on this (although some of the Sandford respondents seemed to be under the impression that we were consulting on a specific development proposal for their village). 15 other places were mentioned as being unsuitable locations for housing.

### ***Other issues raised***

Given the wide-ranging and open nature of the Issues & Scope consultation, it is not surprising that the responses also covered a broad range of subjects. The top ten issues raised in consultation responses were (in order) as follows:

#### *Impact on countryside and/or Green Belt*

As can be seen above in the comments on the housing options, very many respondents were concerned about the impact of housing development on the district's rural countryside and the Green Belt; more than 50 raised this as an issue. This was most often in the context of preventing towns and villages sprawling and merging together, although a small number of respondents raised particular concerns about the loss of good quality agricultural land, potential impact on ancient woodlands, and the broader need to protect biodiversity.

#### *Housing should be located close to employment sites/areas*

Nearly 40 made the point that additional housing should be located near to major employment locations. This tended to be made in support of making allocations in and around Science Vale and, to a much smaller extent, on the edge of Oxford.

#### *Challenge/object to SHMA and housing numbers*

Around 30 respondents said that they objected to South Oxfordshire planning for the housing numbers identified in the SHMA. Objections to the numbers were sometimes based on the preparation of the SHMA and its assumptions about employment and demographic growth; more often they appear to be based on the potential impact of the housing rather than the methodology by which the numbers were arrived at.

#### *Impact on transport*

More than 20 responses said that the district's roads would struggle to cope with the traffic – especially private cars – caused by additional housing growth. This tended to be raised as a general point rather than in respect of particular places, although traffic problems going into and around Oxford were mentioned several times. Congestion and the need to look at improving routes within the Science Vale area were also mentioned more than once. Around 10 responses



commented that public transport would not cope with additional housing growth – usually this was a general rather than place-specific point.

*Infrastructure can't cope*  
*Infrastructure first*

We have grouped these two responses together here, though they tended to deal with matters in a slightly different way.

Around 20 respondents suggested that the district's infrastructure was not up to the task of accommodating additional housing. Most often this was just a general point; as well as roads and transport, which cropped up a lot, other specific things such as water supply and sewerage were referred to.

A similar number commented that it would be important to ensure that infrastructure – including services like schools and shops as well as roads and utilities – is in place before housing. Some argued that housing allocations should be directed towards the larger settlements which already have services in place; others argued that these settlements couldn't take further housing without first providing additional infrastructure.

*[Small-scale] development to meet local [affordable] housing need*

A number of respondents commented that it would be appropriate to allow small-scale developments in most of the districts settlements, subject to proposals demonstrating high-quality design. Sometimes this went hand-in-hand with the suggestion of a more relaxed infill policy, and sometimes was suggested as a means of securing particular types of housing within villages – affordable starter homes and accommodation for elderly residents were both mentioned

*Maximum use of brownfield sites*

Several respondents made the point that we should be making maximum use of brownfield sites before allocating green sites for housing development.

*Market saturation*

A number of respondents suggested that the local market for new homes was at or nearing saturation level. This point was nearly always made in respect of Didcot and the numbers of new homes being built and allocated there; most of those making this comment were of the view that Didcot should not be given any significant further allocations.

*Pressure on local services*

Several comments were made about the impact of new housing and additional residents on the district's services. Schools, doctors and community facilities were all mentioned specifically; some responses made the point more generally.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

### **Q7 – “Are there any particular issues for neighbourhood plans that we should consider in the Local Plan?”**

Several issues were identified by respondents, although it was unclear in a number of the responses whether these were issues that they felt should be covered in the Local Plan or considered in more depth in neighbourhood plans. The issues identified included the following:

- A better understanding of and investment in local infrastructure;
- Sustainability;
- Flooding and flood risk;
- Transport and traffic, including long distance commuting, congestion and suitability of the local road network;
- Cycling and walking routes
- The natural environment;

Several respondents considered that both the Local Plan and neighbourhood plans needed to protect the Green Belt and maintain its quality and extent.

There were also a number of comments made regarding the impact of the emerging Local Plan 2031 on existing neighbourhood plans, both those that have been made and those that are currently being prepared. Whilst some respondents felt that existing neighbourhood plans should not be disrupted by the preparation of the emerging Local Plan 2031 and supported the idea of the plans having a guaranteed life span, with suggestions that this should be at least 10 years; others considered that areas with existing neighbourhood plans should not be immune from change and that neighbourhood plans needed to be flexible and/or reviewed in order to take account of higher housing numbers.

The cost, resource and challenges of preparing neighbourhood plans were noted by several respondents and there were a number of comments that the District Council should be more proactive in encouraging communities to prepare neighbourhood plans and provide more support to communities preparing neighbourhood plans. Some respondents suggested that smaller communities needed additional support, while others argued that additional support should be provided to communities having to review their plans as a result of the emerging Local Plan 2031.

Some respondents considered that the preparation of neighbourhood plans should be mandatory and that the District Council should adopt and enforce minimum standards for neighbourhood plans, for example by setting out general criteria to guide communities in the site selection process.

Several respondents also considered that neighbourhood plans, community-led plans and community views should have more certainty and more weight in the determination of planning applications.

Our Refined Options consultation will ask about whether neighbourhood plans could help to deliver some additional housing in the district's smaller villages.

## HELPING TO MEET THE HOUSING NEEDS OF THE COUNTY AS A WHOLE

### **Q8 – “Do you have any views or ideas about how we can help to meet Oxford’s housing needs?”**

Overall there was a mixed response to this question. A large proportion of respondents questioned the need for additional housing (for example on the basis that the SHMA was wrong, or that pressure results from either immigration or from hypothetical future “wants” for more housing rather than current actual need).

Many residents, the Oxford Green Belt Network and CPRE recommended a “push back” to Oxford City Council – that the city could and should seek to resolve its own problems and accommodate more housing within its boundaries. It was suggested that Oxford could stop planning for more commercial development, which ratchets up housing growth, and instead use the land for homes (for example, at the Northern Gateway site). Several people suggested that before any provision for Oxford’s unmet need is contemplated, opportunities within the city should be used first. Examples were given of empty homes (e.g. a scheme at the Slade in Headington empty and awaiting refurbishment for two years), under-occupied homes, brownfield sites, NHS land, infill sites, employment sites, unoccupied buildings and accommodation above shops all having potential to provide housing. It was suggested that densities of new development in Oxford could be doubled, and that areas of Oxford like Headington and Cowley could accommodate more, and that the 1950s Barton estate (built of steel and asbestos panels) should be rebuilt at higher densities. It was pointed out that aerial photography shows a disproportionate amount of undeveloped green space within Oxford, much in private or college/university ownership. A suggestion was made that the city’s sporting provisions, including the golf course, could be relocated to the Green Belt on the edge of Oxford, freeing up building land. Criticism was also levelled at Oxford City about the quantity of student accommodation being built as opposed to family housing.

Looking at locations outside the City boundaries, Oxford City Council and Savills (on behalf of Magdalen Development Company and Kennet Properties) submitted a detailed proposal for an urban extension to Oxford south of Grenoble Road. This site was discussed in a significant proportion of other representations; there was some support for building here, but also some strong opposition to the idea. Reasons given in favour of this location were that Oxford needs to expand, that it is adjacent to Oxford and a sustainable location near to transport links, schools and other infrastructure, that the land is poor quality with no particular landscape merit, that measures could be built in to protect the Baldons and Sandford-on-Thames, and that it wouldn’t affect many South Oxfordshire residents. Some respondents suggested a Green Belt swap, swapping some areas to be developed for others to be newly included. Savills recommended that the south of Oxford development area should be considered by SODC for both meeting its own housing requirements and Oxford’s unmet needs.

Reasons given against development at Grenoble Road included that it is in the Green Belt, which should be protected as an important principle, that it would be urban sprawl, swallowing up surrounding villages, that growth of Oxford leads to more traffic rat-running through villages like Wheatley, that it would alter the

approach to Oxford, have would have negative environmental and social impacts, destroy natural corridors, and increase flood-risk (especially in view of the proposal for a flood relief channel to alleviate flood risk within Oxford, then discharge back into the Thames at Sandford).

Others suggested site solutions elsewhere in other Oxfordshire districts, such as south of Oxford, east of the Harwell campus, the Didcot power station site, or north of Oxford in the quarry near Kidlington, at Water Eaton where a new station is being built (several respondents mentioned this), and in the Kidlington/Islip area with rapid transport into Oxford and the new Oxford—Marylebone rail link. The prospect was raised of the recently authorised Oxford flood relief channel unlocking development land to the north of the city and area surrounding the Water Eaton Park and Ride development area. Other responses were that the housing would be better located elsewhere in the country – places including Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and the South West of England were mentioned.

In terms of locations within South Oxfordshire, a new town or garden city was mentioned in many responses and received a fair amount of support under this question, with advantages cited including not adding to the traffic congestion around Oxford, not building in the Green Belt, the ability to harness economies of scale and plan-in infrastructure, green spaces, new jobs and shopping, and to achieve attractive lower density housing with gardens and “breathing space” rather than high density housing units which are not in the spirit of South Oxfordshire.

Some respondents suggested providing an alternative work hub for people to commute to, rather than congested Oxford, with Science Vale or Didcot mentioned as the best area for this. For example, Oxford Green Belt Network and CPRE recommended that part of Oxford’s future housing need which stems from notional new job creation should be satisfied by moving the job generators elsewhere in Oxfordshire where high level employment would be beneficial. After that, any remaining need should be met in easy travel-to-work locations outside the Green Belt. Berinsfield (which lies within the Green Belt) was suggested by one respondent as a location where Oxford’s unmet need could be addressed.

Other suggestions for development were beyond Fox Furlong (near Heyford Hill, Sandford), at Wheatley, north east of Oxford, north of villages such as Garsington, Horspath and Wheatley, land off the Oxford Ring Road, the Culham No. 1 site, land near Reading, land at Thame, spreading it through small amounts of infill throughout the district, or extending the boundary of villages where communities want this and would gain amenities and facilities.

There were comments on process for addressing unmet needs, mainly from other local authorities, with general recommendation that the duty to cooperate process as set out in the SPIP agreement should form the mechanism for any decision. One developer commented that Oxford’s unmet housing need must be considered now and appropriately planned for in the Local Plan 2031, rather than postponed until a future review of the Local Plan. Oxford Preservation Trust commented that it difficult to see how the needs of Oxford can be met in any significant way within SODC's area without incursions into the Green Belt, but cautioned that any Green

Belt review would need to be part of a comprehensive review of the whole of the County of Oxfordshire taking in the whole of Oxford's Green Belt.

We are continuing to work with the other Oxfordshire councils to establish the actual number of homes which might make up Oxford's "unmet need", and will return to this in more detail in our Preferred Options consultation later in 2015. In our Refined Options consultation we will look at how some of this unmet need could be planned for within the context of the overall strategy for South Oxfordshire.

## TIME TO LOOK AT THE GREEN BELT?

### **Q9 – “Are there any areas of the Oxford Green Belt that you do not think contribute to meeting the purposes [of the Green Belt]?”**

Generally the response to this was no; of the 148 comments received 87 stated that they did not know of anywhere that did not fulfil the purpose of the Green Belt. 32 comments were made that stated none of the Green Belt should be reduced and a status quo should be retained.

A number of specific locations were mentioned that should be protected including settlements currently inside the Green Belt and Grenoble road.

A number of respondents supported a review of the Green Belt and (in contrast to the previous point) Grenoble road was identified by some as an area acceptable for removal from the Green Belt, along with the Culham Science Centre and Culham No.1 site. Also mentioned as potential areas for removal were other areas at the edge of Oxford (in the north east) and around Wheatley.

### **Q10 – “Are there any additional areas of land that you think should be included in the Oxford Green Belt?”**

Not many respondents to this question were able to identify additional land that might be of value for extending the Green Belt. 28 of the 78 respondents replied that they did not know of anywhere.

As with the previous question there were some calls to retain the status quo, and some places like Grenoble road and the settlements in the Green Belt were identified as places that should be afforded continued Green Belt policy protection.

Some comments were made that suggested a general expansion of the Green Belt and others that if any land was developed on it should be substituted for other land in kind to maintain no overall net loss of Green Belt land.

In general, the responses to these two questions focussed on protecting the Green Belt and the general value of it. A lot of comment was also made about Grenoble Road, but not directly in response to the questions posed, instead focussing on the historic arguments for and against development in that location. There seemed to be some confusion about the difference between “Green Belt” and “greenfield” as a number of responses mentioned places that were outside of the Oxford Green Belt and not well-related to it. Some comments were about the general principle of development in the countryside rather than the value and purpose of the Green Belt.

There was a significant amount of support for collecting data to continue to evaluate the Green Belt (for its continued retention as much as to change it) and for a strategic review, including various citations of the Cherwell Inspector’s comments for a need for such a review.

We have begun a study to look at the land within our Green Belt to see how it performs against the purposes of Green Belt set out in national policy, and we will return to this in more detail in our Preferred Options consultation later in 2015.



## HOW MANY NEW JOBS SHOULD WE PLAN FOR?

### **Q11 – “[Which ideas for attracting and creating jobs] would you support?”**

There was good support (25—28 for each option) for all the options we put forward (fostering jobs in Science Vale, focussing jobs in existing employment areas and towns, steering larger businesses to accessible locations, making provision for small businesses in rural areas, resist pressure for the loss of employment).

A small number of people argued that there was no need for further employment locally, while a similar number said that we should be doing what we can to keep employment sites rather than allowing them to go to housing.

Other suggestions included linking employment to sites and activities in Oxford, promoting more home working and promoting areas that offer the best opportunities for growth.

### **Q12 – “Where should new employment areas be sited?”**

Most responses suggested that we should be locating additional employment close to existing towns including Didcot, Thame, Henley and Wallingford and, across local government boundaries, Oxford and Reading. A significant number suggested Science Vale as the best location for employment areas.

Some respondents considered that we should be locating employment uses close to housing or close to existing employment areas. Other concerns were that employment should be located in accessible locations, close to transport corridors, where infrastructure (especially high-speed broadband), amenities and transport are available, and where cycling and walking are possible.

Several respondents suggested employment should be spread across the district to enable agricultural diversification, a few suggested that it goes where there is business demand; others gave support for home working, and protecting existing employment sites.

We received a number of comments about where not to put new employment land; these included trying to avoid the need for long-distance commuting and causing unacceptable traffic impacts, avoiding the Green Belt, locating new sites away from existing high employment areas, out of market towns and villages, and away from heritage assets. A small number of responses suggesting economic growth should be directed elsewhere in the country.

We will be asking further questions about employment land needs, and suitable areas for it, in our Refined Options consultation.

## HOW SHOULD OUR TOWN CENTRES CHANGE?

### **Q13 – “What do you think we can do to improve our shopping and town centres?”**

The most common suggestion by far was providing adequate amounts of free car parking. Many respondents mentioned Thame as being good in this regard; also reference was made to three hours free parking which has been introduced in Witney. Several people suggested creating additional car parks, rather than automatically using available land as windfall sites for housing, with one suggestion for new underground car parks. A distinction was made between long and short stay, with short-term parking needed near town centres, and longer-term parking for employees further away. Better parking enforcement and free parking on Sundays were also suggested. The most commonly cited place with traffic and parking problems was Henley.

Several respondents suggested park and ride schemes for the towns, including a proposal for a park and ride scheme from the landowner of site F at Thame, utilising the existing high frequency bus service that runs past between Oxford and Aylesbury. Light rail, trains, car free zone and measures to encourage cycling were also recommended by various respondents, with comparisons made to how European cities are served by low cost high quality public transport. Savills, promoting the south of Oxford development area, suggested that housing could result in the opening of the Cowley railway line to passenger trains, with new stations at Cowley and the Oxford Science Park becoming important destinations for commuters from South Oxfordshire into Oxford.

The Issues & Scope consultation paper raised the prospect of town centres needing to shrink or change to adapt to “multi-channel” retailing, and no one challenged or objected to this view. In cases where the result of shrinkage is that the shops are too scattered, so that those in less frequented streets are likely to fail, one person recommended that it would be good to see active policies in place to plan for shrinkage but keep shops grouped together where the customers are. A commonly expressed view was that areas not needed for shops in the future can provide housing opportunities. Only one person expressed concern and proposed that Article 4 Directions should be used to stop changes of use from shops to housing. There was general support for more housing in town centres, above, behind and around the shops. Wallingford was mentioned by more than one respondent as having lost out to Didcot’s improving retail offer in recent years and a place where more housing within the town centre would be beneficial.

A common theme in many responses was a desire to see towns fostering independent retailers rather than chain stores, because they give more personality to a place. A number of people wanted to see more shops that focus on local food, with strong support for farmers’ markets, artisan businesses etc. Several commentators strongly opposed further out of town supermarkets, or indeed any new malls, shopping centres or retail developments (even “express” format supermarkets), with the exception of a desire expressed to see the Orchard Centre Phase 2 in Didcot completed.

There was a call to be more realistic what our town centres will be used for in the future, and there appears to be an acceptance that they will not be for “big ticket” purchases but for leisure activities and service industries – restaurants, cafes, markets, theatres, cinemas, festivals, hairdressers/barbers – or niche retailing such as farmers' markets, specialist foods, and clothes boutiques. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, and fostering tourism including overseas visitors were mentioned. In terms of the mix of uses, betting shops and charity shops were cited as disliked types of occupiers. One person called for more practical shops in Henley, not just expensive fashion and gift shops

Several respondents called for cheaper rents and rates for shops. Pop up shops in empty spaces were supported by several people. Town centre management measures and initiatives like free WiFi, local discount cards and special offer to incentivise people to shop were suggested, as was reimbursement of bus fare from the cost of a shop purchase, to encourage travel by public transport. People proposed various environmental improvements for town centres, ranging from more parks and street trees, to more places to sit down, floral displays, air quality measures and clean streets kept clear of litter and graffiti.

The differing needs of different community sectors were mentioned by several respondents. There was a reminder that not all residents have the internet. One person suggested that town centres need to be made more accessible to the elderly, as the “grey pound” is worth quite a bit in prosperous South Oxfordshire, so improve the number, quality and accessibility of public lavatories, make sure there are plenty of comfortable seats in safe, well lit places, and encourage as far as possible specialist shops. The need for good facilities for the disabled was mentioned by another respondent. Another proposed providing a diversity of restaurants and cafes e.g. for teenagers to meet, one proposed more family friendly restaurants and new leisure activities like ten pin bowling, while another wanted outdoor play areas for a variety of ages to be incorporated within the cafe culture to reflect the current baby boom.

A couple of respondents identified a need for each town to have its own bespoke programme of improvement, rather than a “one size fits all” approach. In terms of the physical environment, two respondents went so far as to suggest that while listed buildings should be refurbished, in other places existing buildings should make way for new modern buildings, including redeveloping some lower density housing e.g. 1920s to 1950s housing.

We will be asking further questions about planning for our town centres in our Refined Options consultation.

## WHERE ARE TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED?

### **Q14 – “What measures or particular new or improved infrastructure do you think would encourage people to choose to walk or cycle, car share, use public transport or make use of new technologies such as electric cars?”**

Of the 155 comments 70 included references to cycle and pedestrian routes. There was a great deal of support for safe off-road routes linking settlements across South Oxfordshire, further detail of these routes is given in response to question 15.

“Green” technology, such as electric car charging points and low emission buses received a lot of attention with more than 20 comments referring to them, generally in positive terms but there was some cynicism about their value in meeting the challenge of pollution and congestion. 18 people also made the point that sustainable communities and planning for homes near to jobs would reduce the need to travel. Park and Ride schemes and car sharing were also high priorities for a number of people.

Another big topic amongst respondents was the quality of services and infrastructure. 19 times this theme came up and each time it was stated that the quality and frequency of public transport should be improved as should road surfaces. Integration of services and timetables was a suggestion made by some respondents. However, a number of people also suggested that the price of public transport should also be reduced.

There were a number of other specific locations and ideas raised by individual respondents, including how to engage with air quality challenges, new crossings of the River Thames, pedestrianisation and shared space and improving public rights of way.

### **Q15 – “Are there any such routes, to and from specific destinations, which you think we should be considering for specific walking or cycling routes?”**

The highest number of responses to this (26 of 76) were for routes into and around Oxford.

Other routes mentioned were:

Across Science Vale	Thame to Chinnor
Around Thame	Thame to Haddenham Station
Bayswater road	Thame to Oxford
Benson to Oxford	Thame to Wheatley
Berinsfield to Oxford	Thame to Wheatley (into Oxford)
Berinsfield to Wallingford	Tiddington to Thame
Chinnor to Lewknor	Villages to Reading
Ewelme to Wallingford	Villages to service centres
Eynsham to Oxford	Wallingford to Cholsey
“Focus on commuter routes”	Wallingford to Didcot
Garsington to Cowley	Waterpenny to Oxford
Garsington to Oxford	Watlington to Lewknor

Henley to Shiplake (into Reading)	Western Park to Didcot Railway station
Milton Park to Didcot	Wheatley to Cuddesdon
RAF Benson to Crowmarsh	Wheatley to Garsington
Sonning Common to Reading	Wheatley to Horspath
Tetsworth to Horspath (into Oxford)	

**Q16 – “Are there any particular transport issues or solutions that you think we should be considering the Local Plan 2031?”**

There appeared to be very little consensus in the responses to this question. The 113 comments raised 52 separate issues (the single most common response from 11 respondents was “no”).

A third Thames crossing at Reading was mentioned 10 times, and this was generally in support of it as a way to reduce the pressure on Sonning Bridge and reduce congestion through Reading.

Cycle routes were again highlighted as something that should be a priority in South Oxfordshire, to reduce the impact of transport related pollution and congestion but also to promote healthy lifestyles.

There was some concern about general congestion across the district and also that increased development would exacerbate this. A particular issue appeared to be the management of HGV traffic.

Two place-specific schemes were referenced relatively often; these were parking (and/or Park and Ride) at Lewknor (jct. 6 M40), and the need for a new bridge to reduce congestion around Culham and Clifton Hampden.

## PROVIDING FOR TRAVELLING COMMUNITIES

### **Q17 – “Where do you think we should plan extra pitches for travellers, can you suggest any suitable sites for us to assess?”**

Although the need to provide sites for travellers was clearly explained in the consultation document, approximately ten per cent of respondents felt that no additional sites should be provided, and a similar number could not identify any suitable sites for traveller use within the district.

Brownfield sites were favoured, with Didcot Power Station (not in our district) and old airfields – specifically Worminghall airfield (also outside South Oxfordshire) – suggested as sites that should be considered. There was also support for the following types of sites:

- land adjacent to major transport links such as the M40 and A34;
- expanding or extending existing traveller sites, with Middleground in Wheatley being the favoured existing site to extend; and
- granting permanent permission to sites that currently have temporary permission, although there was a suggestion that this should not be a blanket proposal and some opposition to making permission at Northend permanent.

Some respondents supported the idea of locating traveller sites further away from settlements although there was some opposition to countryside and village locations. An appropriate level of local services and infrastructure, including access to sewerage and rubbish disposal were also seen as important determining factors; although several respondents considered access to public transport to not be essential.

We have commissioned consultants to produce a piece of work called an Evaluation of Transport Impact (ETI). This will assess the impact of development on the road network and where particular bottle necks might occur. We will return to transport issues in our Preferred Options consultation later in 2015.

## YOUR SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**Q18 – “We would also like to ask if anyone knows of any areas that would be suitable for redevelopment in their area. Are there any in your area?”**

We received around 70 suggestions – with varying degrees of detail and supporting information – of sites or locations which may be suitable for development.

As part of the Local Plan evidence base we will be updating our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), and we will use this to appraise sites’ suitability for development.

We will continue to collect information about potential development sites – you can get in touch with us via [planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk) if you would like to submit a site.

## OUR PLANNING POLICIES

### **Q19 – “Are there any of our plan policies that need reviewing or changing, and if so, why?”**

We received around 80 comments on planning policies; some of these were specific comments on existing policies from our Core Strategy and saved policies from our 2006 Local Plan; others were suggestions for issues which respondents felt we have not addressed in existing policy but should.

There was very little uniformity to the comments – most of the policies which you suggested we should review were mentioned by only one or two respondents, suggesting that perhaps there is no great depth of feeling about our detailed policies. We will look at reviewing our policies more closely later on in the Local Plan 2031 process, and we will return to this issue in a future consultation.



## **Feedback from alternative consultation events**

We used a number of additional engagement methods as a way of capturing consultation data. These additional mechanisms were targeted at “hard-to-reach” groups with identified approaches for ethnic minority groups, disabled groups and young people. The sessions primarily took the shape of focus group work or workshops with the support of the Equalities Officer and the Youth Engagement Coordinator. Unfortunately, due to a lack of participatory interest the workshop with our ethnic minority engagement panel had to be cancelled. The disability groups represented were South Oxfordshire Disability Panel, Didcot Access Group, Mobility Issues Group Goring and Mobility Issues Group Wallingford. The sessions with young people were through secondary schools. The secondary schools where sessions took place were Wallingford School, Lord Williams’s School, Didcot Girls’ School and Wheatley Park School.

### ***DISABILITY ENGAGEMENT***

Focus groups with four representative disability groups yielded some, but limited consensus on a number of consultation matters. There was strong consensus across all groups that no one approach would provide the solution to the distribution option. There was general support for hybrid options with Option E “Dispersal” being a common factor in most of the hybrid approaches suggested.

There was support for a housing distribution approach that helped to sustain or create key disability facilities such as “changing places facilities” or disabled access toilets. In addition, that this distribution option should support a reasonable balance of these facilities across the district.

There were a number of specific targeted areas of discussion regarding disability and mobility issues. There was a general consensus that access to suitable housing for people with mobility issues needs to have stronger policy support.

Although outside of the scope of the specifics of the consultation, all groups raised concerns with the lack of infrastructure investment that has taken place over recent time. Importantly, groups expressed concern about the ability of current and emerging funding mechanisms to cope with the perceived scale of infrastructure investment needed in settlements across the district.

### ***YOUTH ENGAGEMENT***

The youth engagement workshops took a different approach with young people initially identifying what they liked and disliked about their areas. Common themes identified for preferring a local area were that it was quiet, had access to a reasonable range of shops and facilities, along with a general sense of community. The common themes disliked about their areas were poor transport links, poor access to shops and suitable facilities (particularly those for young people) and road safety and associated traffic.

Discussions around the distribution options provided no clear preferred approach or hybrid approach from the young people. All groups recognised the benefits of Option H “Locating development in particular settlements where it could help fund

projects". This was primarily because it is a "bottom-up" approach. However, many concerns were expressed regarding whether this approach would yield sufficient funds to provide any identified infrastructure projects and ultimately be too costly. The extremely contrasted approach of Option D "All growth in a single new settlement" to that of Option E "Dispersal" received balance support and objection from all groups. However these two options along with the general approach of putting any future development in larger settlements were strongly recurring themes.

## **What happens next?**

We will use the responses to this consultation to refine our vision and strategy for South Oxfordshire, and we are carrying out further consultation on the new Local Plan – what we are calling a “Refined Options” consultation – in February and March 2015.

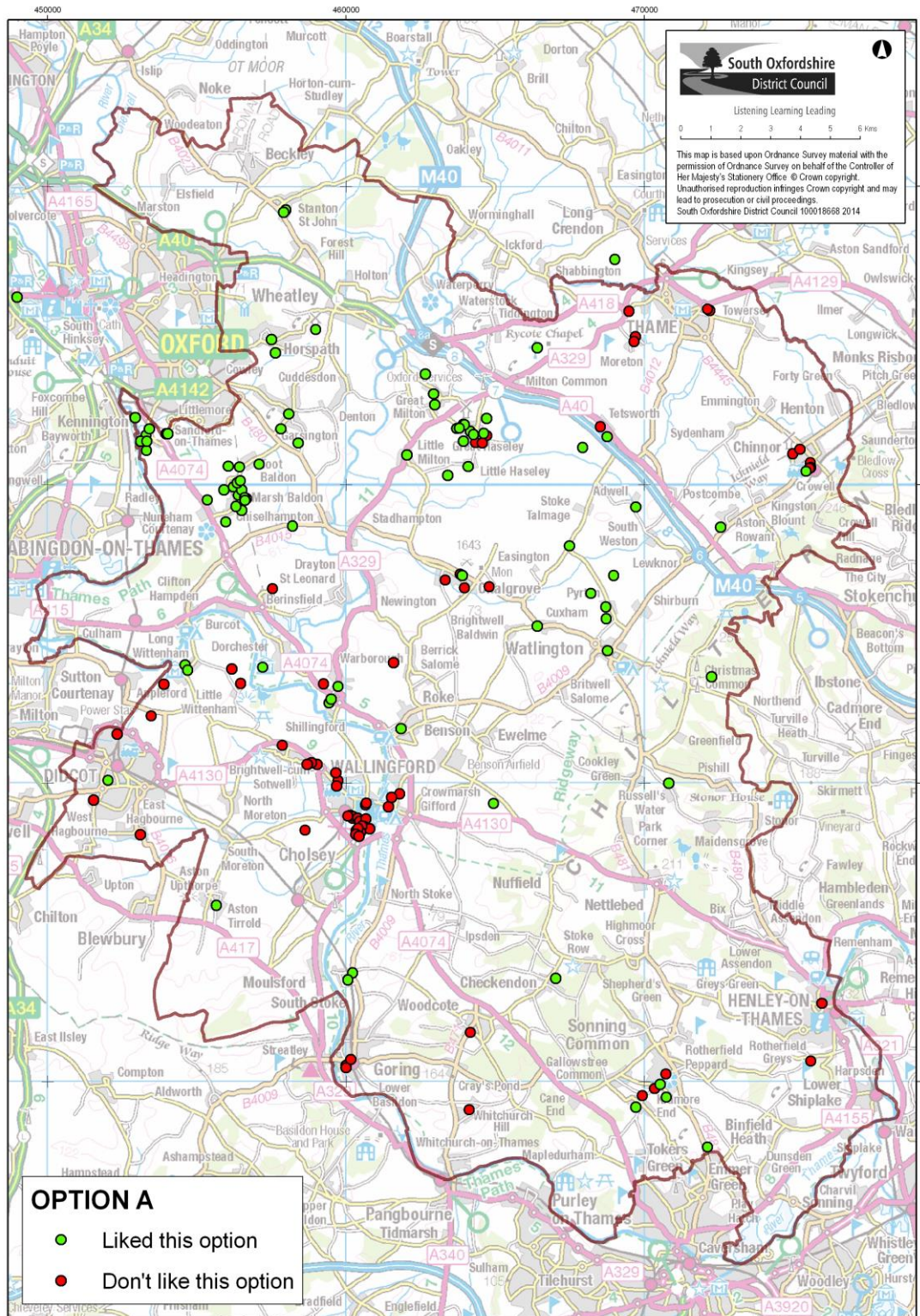
The Refined Options Consultation will set out how we could take the best ideas from the Issues and Scope Consultation and allocate additional housing to different parts of the district. We’ll also ask questions about other topics where the evidence studies we’ve been working on since last summer have given us more information – finding land for employment, supporting our town centres, and planning for Gypsies and Travellers.

We intend to carry out a Preferred Options consultation in the autumn of 2015 – we have updated our Local Development Scheme to reflect the fact that our overall Local Plan timetable has been extended to take account of planning for unmet housing need from the City of Oxford. We are also updating our Statement of Community Involvement, to reflect the lessons learned from this and other consultations, and to ensure that we continue to reach people in efficient and effective ways.

We hope that you will continue to take part in our consultations – our Local Plan 2031 will only truly be successful if it is grounded in and shaped by the knowledge, understanding and ambitions of the community across South Oxfordshire.

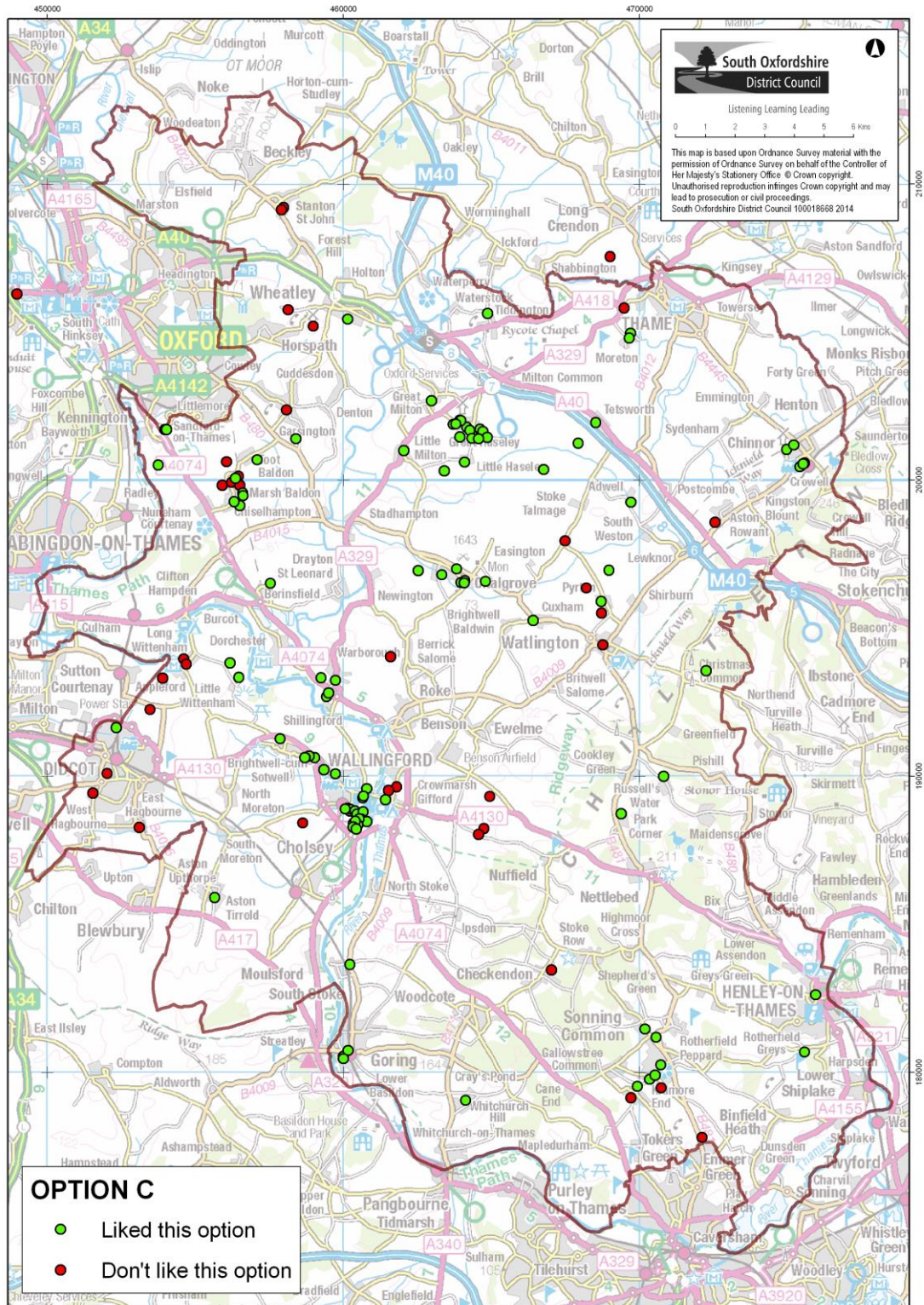
# Appendix 1 – Housing Option response maps

## OPTION A – CONTINUE TO USE CORE STRATEGY DISTRIBUTION

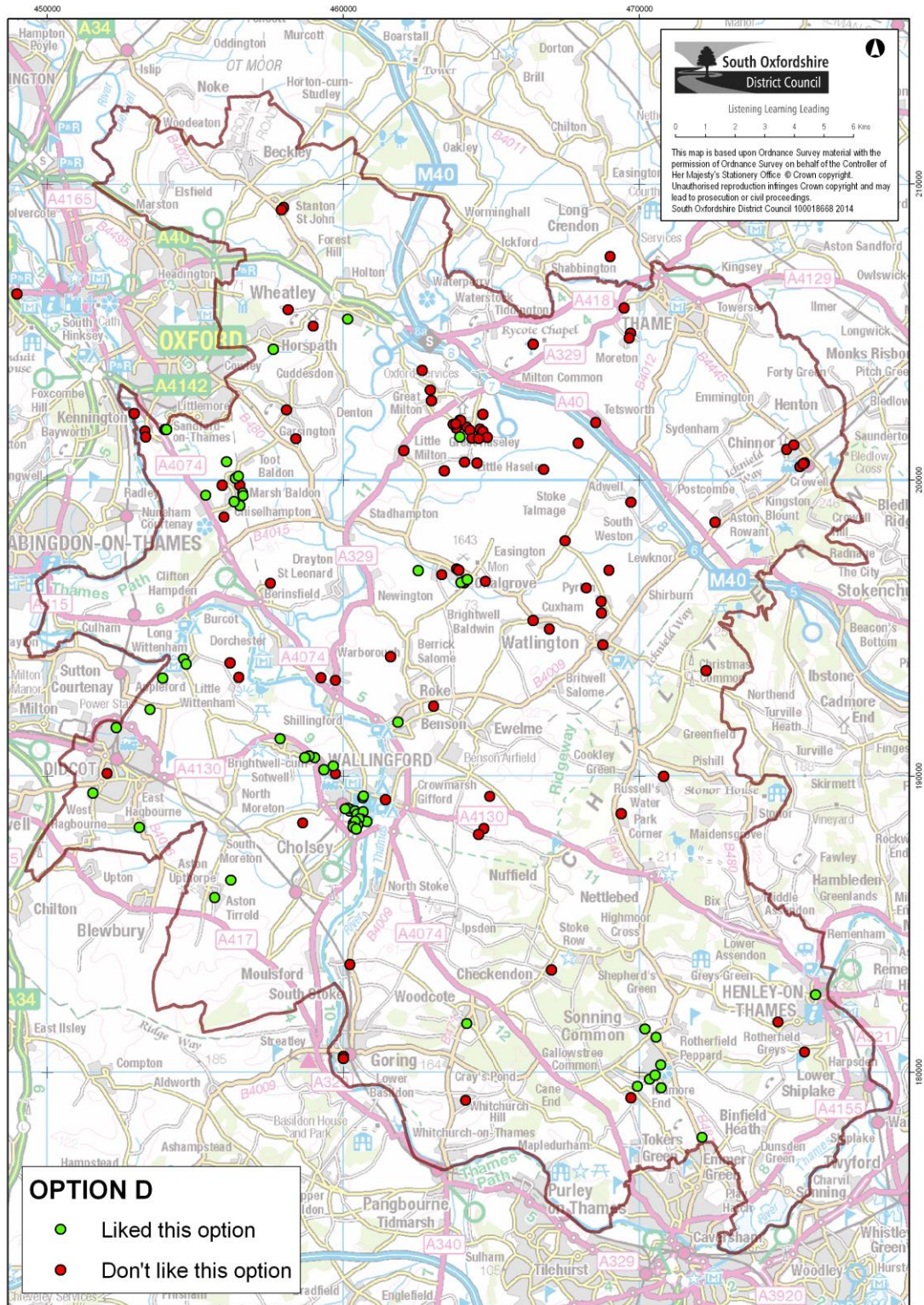


## OPTION B – SCIENCE VALE PLUS ‘SUSTAINABLE SETTLEMENTS’

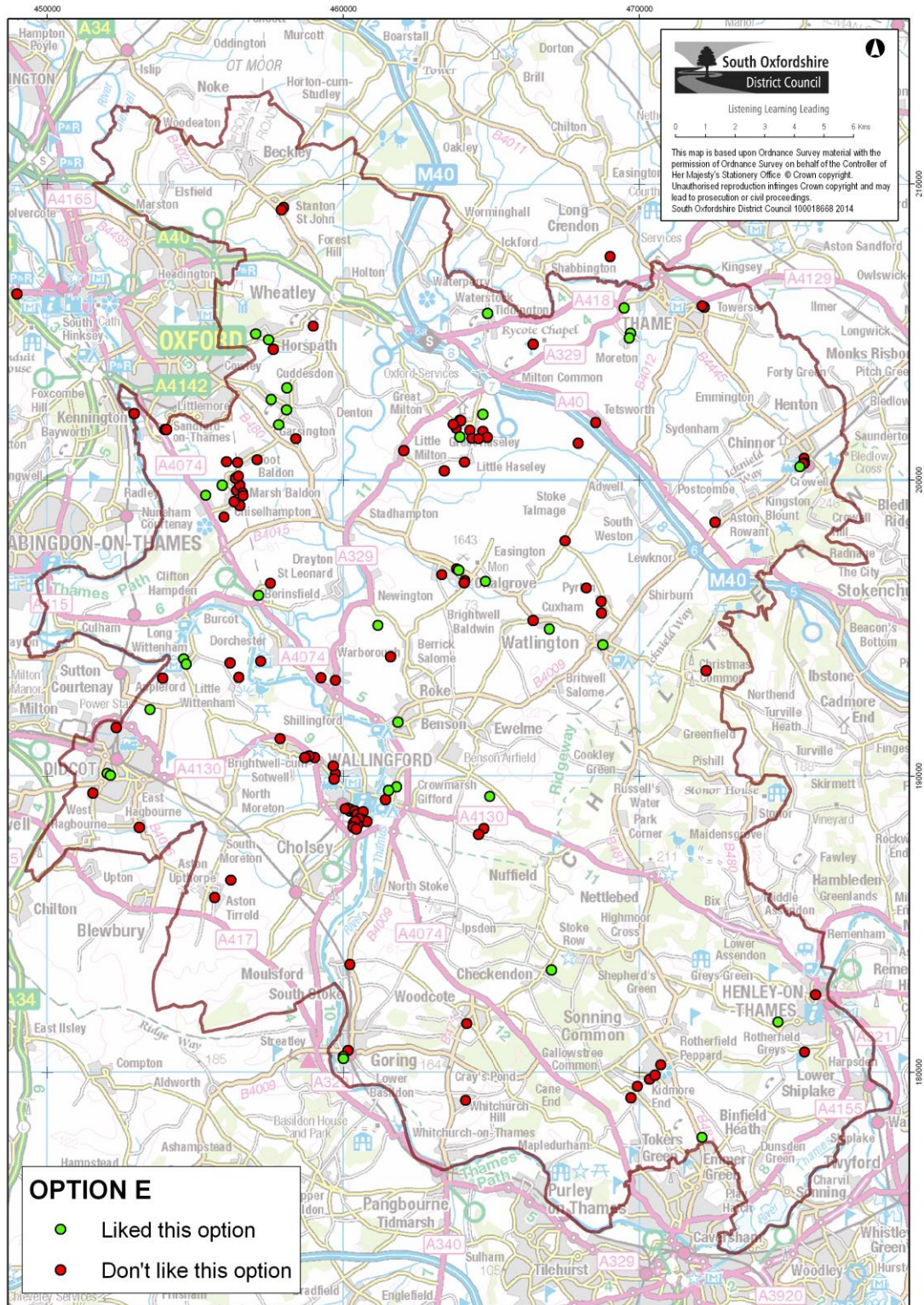
# OPTION C – ALL IN SCIENCE VALE



# OPTION D – ALL GROWTH IN A SINGLE NEW SETTLEMENT

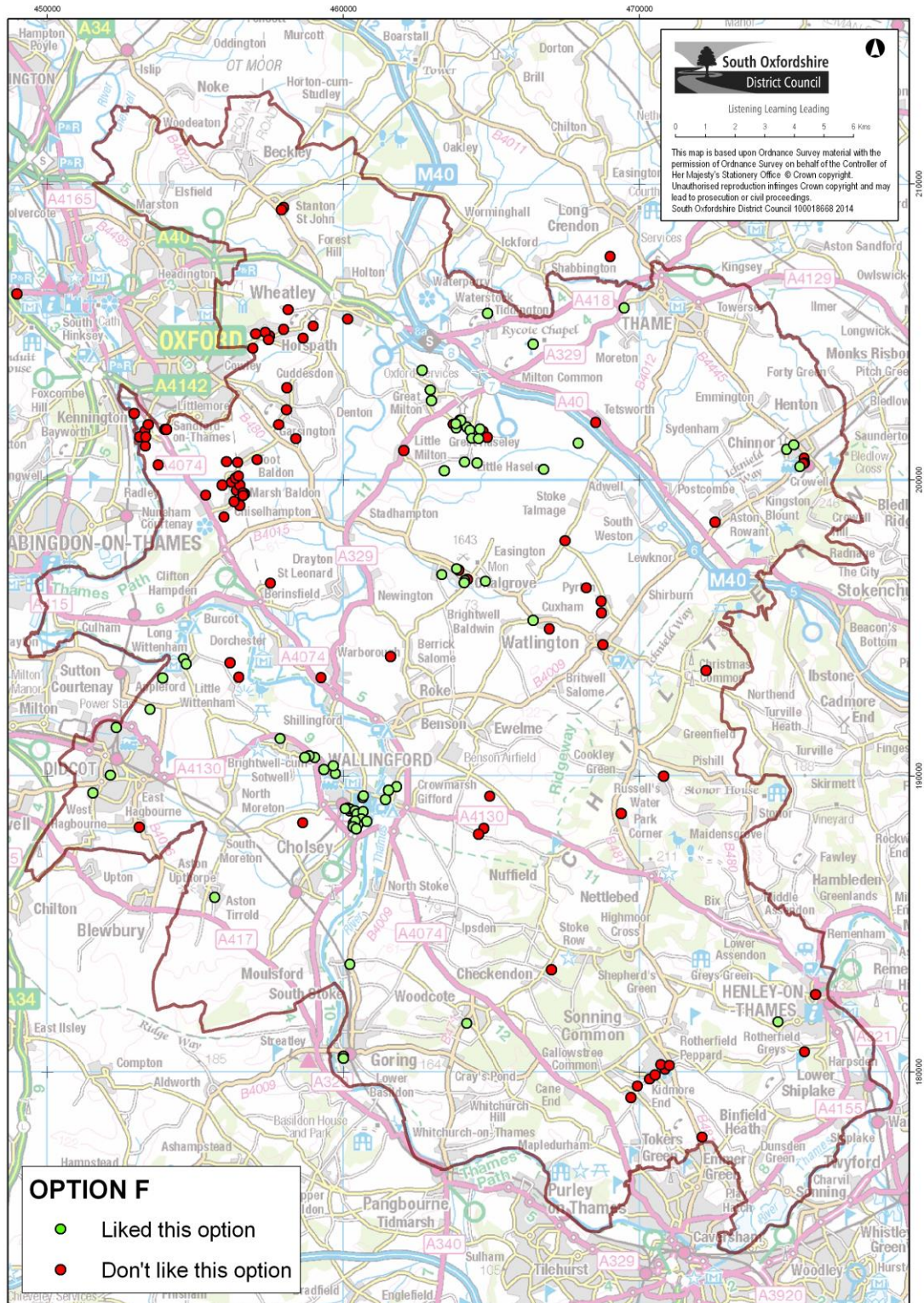


# OPTION E – DISPERSAL

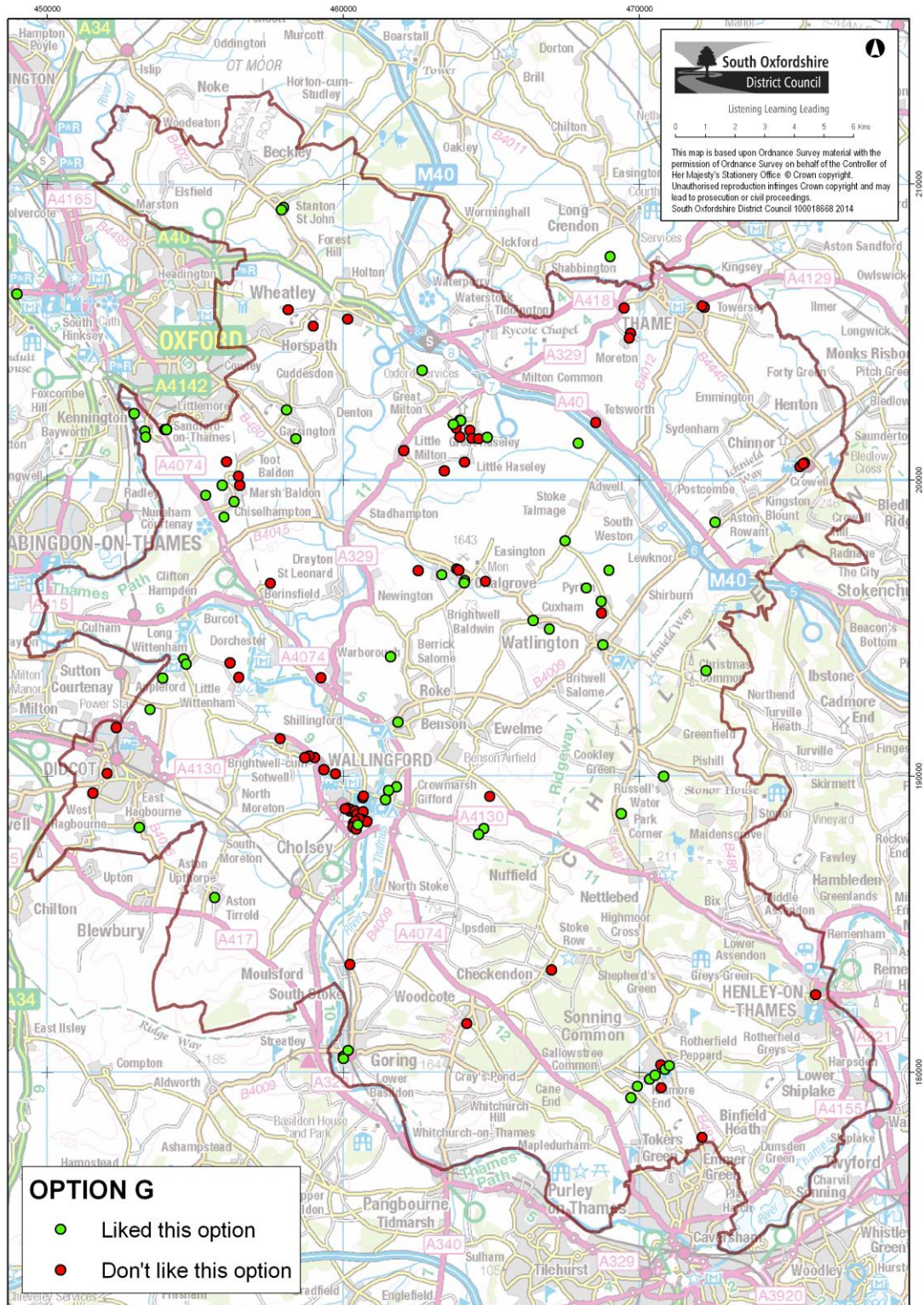




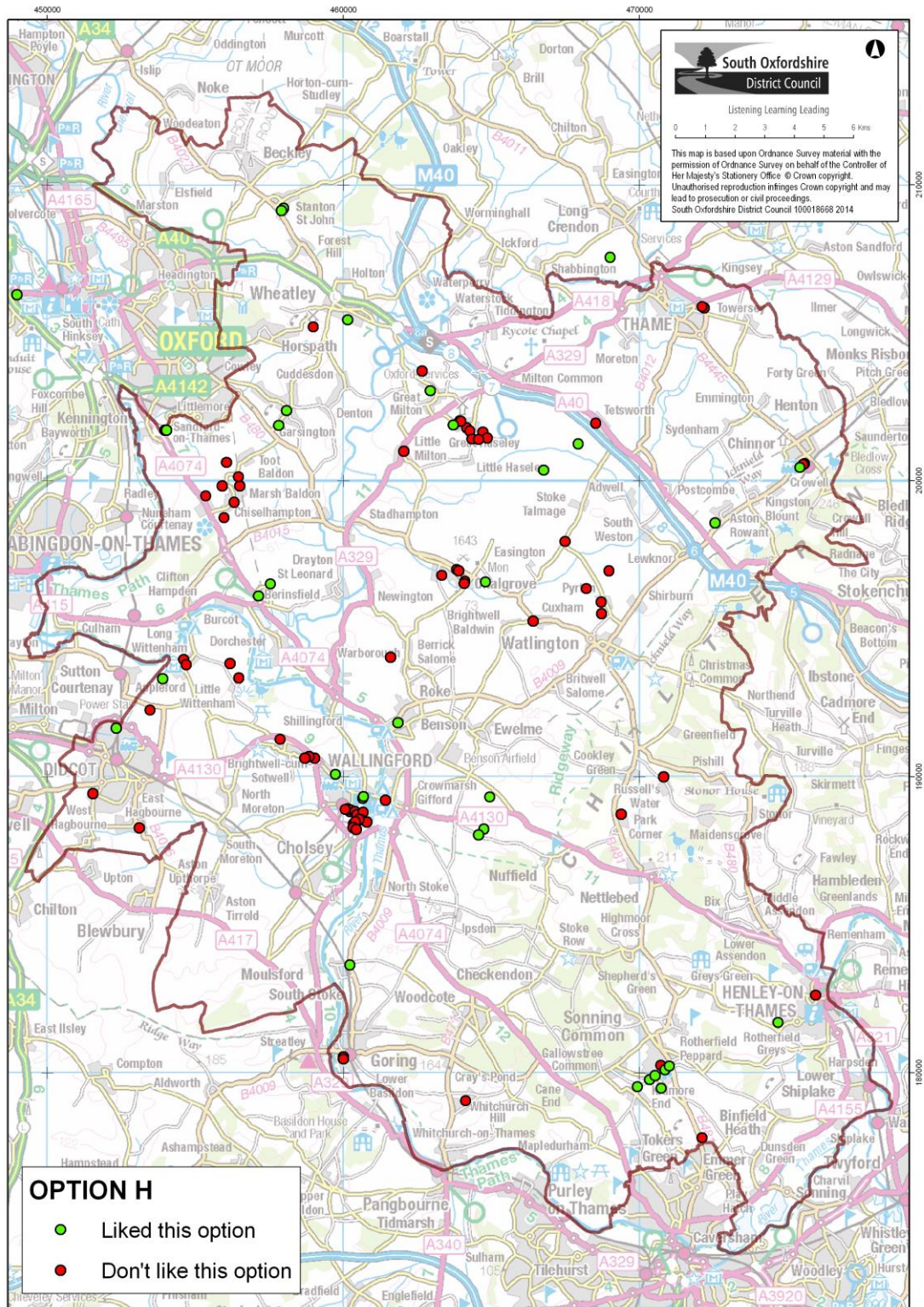
# OPTION F – NEXT TO NEIGHBOURING MAJOR URBAN AREAS



# OPTION G – RAISING DENSITIES



# OPTION H – LOCATING DEVELOPMENT IN SETTLEMENTS WHERE IT COULD HELP FUND PROJECTS



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