

1.20 The County Council's overall aims and underlying objectives for the Plan are:

Aim 1. To protect and enhance the environment and character of Oxfordshire.

Objectives:

- i. to provide effective protection and enhancement for Oxfordshire's biodiversity, landscape and heritage;
- ii. to reduce pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases;
- iii. to maintain and improve the quality of surface and groundwater;
- iv. to protect the quality of soils and agricultural land.

Aim 2. To encourage the efficient use of land, energy and resources.

Objectives:

- i. to locate development where it can reduce the need to travel and encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport;
- ii. to minimise the use of greenfield land;
- iii. to encourage the location and design and development which makes efficient use of energy and resources, and minimises waste for disposal.

Aim 3. To support progress towards a better quality of life for all Oxfordshire's people.

Objectives:

- i. to provide for sufficient new dwellings to meet the requirements of Regional Planning Guidance, of an appropriate size and type for Oxfordshire's residents, and to contribute to meeting affordable housing need;
- ii. to support communities in which people have access to jobs, services, community and leisure facilities;
- iii. to provide for a range of travel options to meet transport needs; and
- iv. to provide safe and attractive places to live and work.

Aim 4. To sustain prosperity by supporting sustainable and appropriate economic development.

Objectives:

- i. to support the continued development of Oxfordshire's existing and emerging growth sectors and clusters;
- ii. to provide for development to meet the economic needs of the county's residents and local businesses; and
- iii. to support the diversification of the rural economy in Oxfordshire.

1.21 Finding the right balance between the objectives is at the heart of the Plan.

Sustainability appraisal

- 1.22 European Directive 2001/42/EC provides for the "assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment", known as Strategic Environmental Assessment. It applies to all plans whose formal preparation began after July 2004, and those which were already in preparation but will not be adopted by July 2006. The directive has now been translated into UK regulations in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The Regulations do not apply to the Oxfordshire Structure Plan because it does not fall within the time limits set out above. However, a broader sustainability appraisal has been carried out as the Structure Plan has been prepared. A summary is provided below, but full details are in the sustainability appraisal background paper⁶.
- 1.23 The sustainability appraisal was carried out by a multidisciplinary, in-house team, with independent expert advice from consultants Levett-Therivel. Appraisal took place at each of the main stages in preparing the draft Structure Plan, starting with the aims and objectives of the Plan to check that they were consistent with each other and with other key national, regional and local objectives. The five broad options for accommodating new development in Oxfordshire published for consultation in April 2002 were appraised against the draft aims and objectives. Subsequently four more detailed options for the locational strategy were appraised in the same way. Finally the policies in the deposit draft Structure Plan were appraised using a matrix of nine environmental, social and economic factors to reflect those in the European SEA Directive.
- 1.24 The appraisal process showed that the draft Oxfordshire Structure Plan overall should contribute towards sustainability principles. It was a valuable tool in identifying negative and positive aspects of development options and the policies and proposals in the draft Plan whilst work was progressing at each stage. While some of the negative impacts can be mitigated when development is implemented there are aspects of the Plan that will have a negative impact in terms of sustainability, for example by using some greenfield land for development. The initial appraisal of the broad options highlighted additional advantages and disadvantages of the options that resulted in amendments before an Issues Paper was published for consultation in 2002. The appraisal of more detailed strategies produced clear and concise positives and negatives that were fed into the informal member/officer working group preparing the Plan and contributed to the decision making process. The appraisal of policies allowed for constructive comments to be taken into account by policy authors before the final draft Plan was produced.

⁶ Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 Deposit Draft, Sustainability Appraisal, September 2003.

2. A strategy for Oxfordshire

Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter sets out the proposed pattern of future development for Oxfordshire: it includes firm proposals for the distribution of housing and other development for the period to 2016. The strategy seeks to take forward the aims and objectives of the Plan by:
- providing for the development of new homes, jobs and services and facilities to meet the needs of Oxfordshire's people;
 - concentrating housing development in urban areas where it can be easily accessible to jobs, shops, services, community facilities and public transport;
 - providing for an increased number of affordable houses, including housing for key workers;
 - providing the framework to help sustain prosperity and develop Oxfordshire's economy;
 - protecting the countryside, towns and villages and the landscape setting and character of Oxford city;
 - providing in rural areas for development to support the economic and social well being of communities;
 - ensuring supporting infrastructure and services are provided to support development;
 - encouraging the location and design of development to promote high quality environments, make efficient use of energy and other resources and to help reduce the need to travel; and
 - providing the necessary raw materials, for example minerals to enable development to take place.

General

- 2.2 The focus for development in the county will be on the existing larger urban areas, where most homes, jobs and services are located. The Plan seeks to maintain and enhance the role of town centres and to improve the range of services and facilities that help to create attractive communities.
- 2.3 A priority is to ensure that best use is made of previously developed land and buildings within urban areas to reduce the need for greenfield development. This priority is supported by a policy to secure higher density housing development, particularly in the main urban areas and close to town centres where there is good public transport. Higher density development must, however, also achieve higher quality of design and add to the attractiveness of the built environment.
- 2.4 Taking account of the regional target that at least 60% of all new housing will be built on previously developed land, the local authorities will monitor the potential for new housing on sites within built up areas and the timing of the release of new greenfield sites will be managed and phased accordingly.
- 2.5 Because of high house prices across Oxfordshire a priority issue is the provision of more affordable housing, including homes for key workers. Policies in the Plan seek to provide a framework for securing higher levels of affordable housing than in the past. Many of the houses to be built on previously developed land will be built on sites in Oxford, which together with policies to secure affordable and key worker housing being pursued by Oxford City Council, could provide more houses in the city for those who cannot afford to buy or rent in the open market.
- 2.6 The strategy and policies support the need to sustain economic prosperity and to build on Oxfordshire's strengths – in particular the development of its educational, scientific and technological economy. The Plan looks to achieve a better balance between homes and jobs across the county to help spread the benefits of Oxfordshire's prosperous economy, to ease pressures on Oxford and to reduce the need for commuting to Oxford.
- 2.7 The Plan reflects Oxford's central role in the life of the county. The County Council wants to see Oxford thrive as a first class vibrant city, modern in outlook with a diverse economy. The Plan promotes Oxford's role as a sub-regional centre for shopping, leisure and cultural activities. Oxford will continue to build on its strengths – education, health and related research and development activities. One of the priorities for the County Council is to progress plans for the urban renaissance of the West End of Oxford for the benefit of everyone who lives in Oxfordshire⁹.
- 2.8 This does not mean that Oxford should grow unchecked, so as to damage its heritage and landscape setting and increase pressures on transport and other services. Because of the substantial imbalance between jobs and workforce in Oxford, the overall growth of employment in the city will continue to be limited. Land is however available within the city to support the development of employment sectors that need to be located there. Other activities will be encouraged to continue to locate outside Oxford. Support is given for small-scale development which helps to maintain the diversity of the Oxford economy.

⁹ Oxfordshire Plan 2005-2006, Oxfordshire County Council.

Rural communities

- 2.9 For the rural areas of Oxfordshire the Plan seeks to ensure that the countryside is protected whilst the needs of rural communities for affordable housing, jobs and services and diversification of the local economy are met.
- 2.10 The role of the smaller towns and villages as service centres needs to be maintained. A particular concern is the decline of some rural centres and the difficulty that young people, for example, face in being able to stay in their local community. It is not always possible to maintain all shops and services in smaller settlements. The Plan, therefore, seeks to channel a limited amount of development to the smaller towns and larger villages in which there is a reasonable range of shops, services and community facilities already and which can serve a group of surrounding villages. Small-scale development on the edge of some villages could help to meet local needs for affordable housing.



The proposed pattern of development 2001-2016

- 2.11 The Plan emphasises the concentration of development on the main urban areas, including Oxford, where a larger amount of housing growth is provided for compared to previous Plans. A large number of houses and other development are planned already at Oxford, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney under the previous Structure Plan. This Plan adds Grove to the locations which are planned for significant additional development. The main locations for new employment development will be Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney to encourage a more balanced and diverse range of employment in the towns.
- 2.12 Grove is proposed as a main location for development in the south of the county where it will help to contribute to the needs of the expanding employment base in southern Oxfordshire including major sites at the Harwell complex, Milton Park and Didcot. Development at Grove will require improved secondary school provision and should help to improve the range of shops and services at Grove and the attractiveness of Wantage town centre. Improved public transport services to Didcot, Milton Park and Harwell Campus will be necessary. Substantial improvements on the A417 will be needed to provide priority for public transport at congestion points and to bring the route to an adequate standard of safety. The County Council will continue to press for rail services to call at a reopened Grove station. This Plan supports development at Grove which could extend until 2021. As there are already problems with the transport infrastructure, it is essential that the required improvements are in place before any development is occupied. Before planning permission can be given, it will be necessary to carry out a full environmental assessment into the possible risks of flooding both locally and further downstream.

