

- 6.12 Due to the imbalance of jobs to working residents in Oxford, the shortage of affordable housing and the Green Belt around Oxford, the County Council believes consideration should be given to redevelopment for housing or mixed uses on some employment sites when the existing use ceases, and where it is shown that re-use for employment is not required or no longer viable. However, land or premises in use by small businesses should be retained where possible. The loss of sites for small firms from urban areas can result in a loss of local economic diversity. High land values achieved for housing are a main factor resulting in the loss of such sites.

## **Employment land provision in the towns**

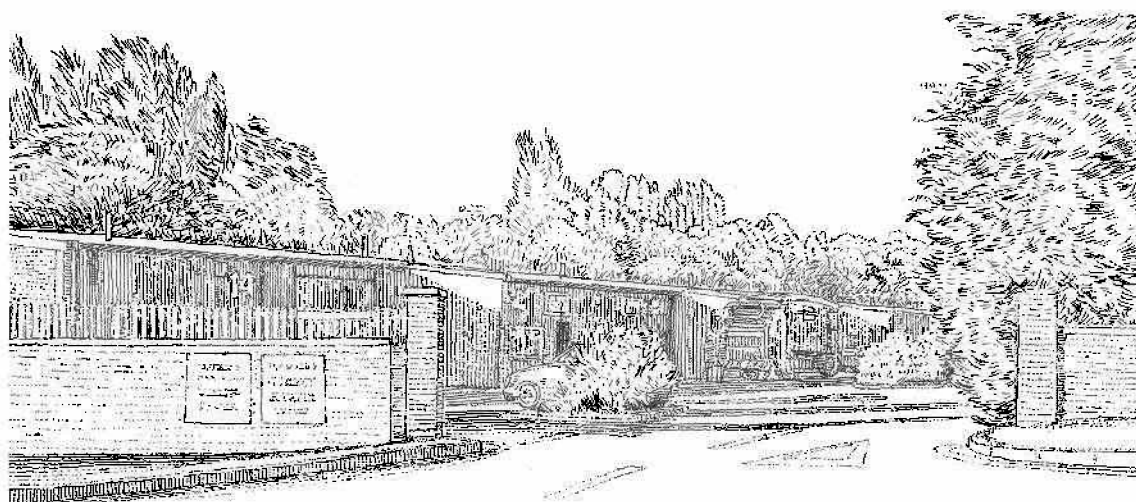
- E3 In the main towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney the provision of land for employment will be made:**
- a) to achieve an appropriate balance between the number and type of jobs and the size and skills of the local workforce; and
  - b) to provide for the expansion and relocation of existing local firms and to accommodate firms which need to be located in the area, including provision to support the development of science based industries or other important business clusters.

A limited amount of land for employment will be made available in Abingdon, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Henley, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Grove. In deciding on the amount of employment land available in the above towns, weight shall be given to the content of action plans that have been carried out following health checks and other processes. Where such plans show the need for additional land to maintain the vibrancy of market towns, then additional employment land shall be released.

**Elsewhere the provision of land for employment generating uses will be restrained and limited to activities that do not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic.**

- 6.13 Policy E3 emphasises the role of the towns in providing local employment opportunities.
- 6.14 In Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney land for employment is available but new provision for employment, either through new allocations or through making better use of existing employment land and premises, may be required.
- 6.15 In assessing the amount of land required for employment generating development in these towns, local planning authorities should seek to work towards achieving a balance between jobs locally and the needs of the future workforce in the town and surrounding area. Audits of employment land will help determine the range of sites and premises required to meet future needs and that of the local area.
- 6.16 It is expected that some firms which have outgrown their existing premises and are looking to relocate locally, as well as new businesses, may seek to locate in one of the main towns.

- 6.17 Business clusters are companies defined by their geographical concentration and linkages. Government policy stresses the importance of clusters where knowledge transfer and innovation is key because of their role in driving the future of the economy. The County Council sees the benefits of some expanding knowledge and science based companies which may be moving on from research and development to manufacturing, locating in the towns. Local planning authorities should make provision for innovation start up units, small firms and 'grow-on' space for expanding firms. Bicester could in particular benefit from its location within the Oxford-Cambridge arc (a corridor of economic potential stretching from Oxford through Milton Keynes to Cambridge); on the proposed East-West rail link; and also situated close to the hub of research and development activity in the Oxford area.



- 6.18 While the focus of development is on the larger urban areas, Policy E3, together with Policy G1, supports development of an appropriate scale to meet local employment needs. The towns of Abingdon, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Henley, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Grove are identified as locations where a limited amount of land should be provided because of their role as important local centres for services and employment. To this end, local authorities should take into account the content of action plans that have been carried out following healthchecks<sup>27</sup> and other processes when determining the supply of land for employment in the above towns.
- 6.19 In recent years a lot of land has been developed for warehousing and distribution in the county, in particular close to the motorway and the trunk road network at Banbury, Bicester and Didcot. Warehousing and distribution facilities use a lot of land, employ relatively few people and generate a lot of heavy goods movement. Local planning authorities should seek to restrict this type of activity to sites with good access to rail and specifically allocated or used for this purpose.

<sup>27</sup> The Countryside Agency developed the Market Towns Healthcheck initiative in 2001 to enable local communities to assess their market town in terms of their social and economic well being and draw up an action plan. To date the towns of Faringdon and Carterton have carried out healthchecks.

## **Small firms and local employment diversity**

**E4** Proposals for small scale premises (up to about 500 square metres) including proposals that encourage farm or rural diversification will normally be permitted in appropriate locations.

- 6.20 The County Council recognises the importance of small businesses to the local economy. The majority of firms in the county employ 25 or fewer people and cover a vast range of economic activity.
- 6.21 Policy E4 provides for new small premises of one or more units for occupation by firms of up to 500 square metres where the location is appropriate when considered against the environmental, transport and other policies in the development plan. Key considerations are the overall scale of activity proposed, traffic generation and impact, and the general desire to locate development in locations which serve to reduce travel by the private car. Local planning authorities can make provision for sensitive small scale development in rural settlements where they consider that there is a need and the development is otherwise acceptable.
- 6.22 The farming industry has been subject to considerable change and financial and other pressures in recent years. The Plan seeks to provide local employment opportunities in rural areas in appropriate locations that can promote diversification and support the local economy. Farm diversification schemes (for example, the conversion of former farm buildings) can help to provide additional income and employment. The reuse or adaptation of traditional rural buildings for business use or tourism will generally be encouraged where they offer high quality and well designed conversions and do not cause significant highway or traffic problems.

## **Tourism and culture**

**E5** Tourism projects which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the county's inherent qualities and heritage will be encouraged in appropriate locations, particularly where the proposed development is accessible by foot, cycling or public transport.

- 6.23 Oxfordshire is internationally known as a place of culture. At the heart of the county is Oxford's historic built environment and its standing as a centre of learning. Market towns such as Henley, Woodstock, Banbury and Burford are attractions in their own right. The county's natural heritage includes three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, rivers such as the Thames and Cherwell and networks of nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest, many of which can be visited.
- 6.24 The County Council wants to promote tourism and culture in ways that contribute to, rather than detract from, the quality of the environment and the quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors alike<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> A Cultural Strategy for Oxfordshire 2001-2006, Oxfordshire County Council.

- 6.25 Policy E5 seeks to ensure that the tourism industry prospers through enterprises which seek to integrate tourism opportunities with schemes which conserve, maintain, upgrade and enhance the wildlife, landscape, cultural and historical interest of the county. This means encouraging projects that are sensitive in scale and design and located so as to be accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. The re-use of buildings that contribute to small scale tourism-based rural diversification is supported. The provision of good quality facilities and accommodation to cater for visitors is supported in accordance with the sequential approach set out in Policy TC2. Generally, large scale visitor attractions such as theme parks are unlikely to be acceptable.



- 6.26 The scale of tourism activity can cause problems in terms of sheer visitor numbers and traffic impacts. Local planning authorities, tourist boards and others involved in promoting and managing tourism can, through visitor management plans and other initiatives, help to minimise impacts and identify ways of maximising the local and environmental benefits, for example, by seeking to increase the numbers of staying visitors.

## **Employment and housing**

**E6** In considering proposals for employment generating development which would generate a demand for housing, account will be taken of the existing or planned housing provision.

- 6.27 The policy seeks to maintain a balance between employment-generating development and the capacity of the local housing market to absorb any new employment growth generated. Consideration needs to be given, for example, as to whether prospective employers will employ local people or will bring most of their workforce with them and add to pressures in the local housing market.



## 7. Housing

- 7.1 Government policy for housing is that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home, that there should be greater choice of housing, and that housing should not reinforce social distinctions. A key objective of the Structure Plan is to provide sufficient new dwellings to meet requirements of Regional Planning Guidance, of an appropriate size and type for Oxfordshire's residents, and to contribute to meeting affordable housing need. This chapter sets out the amount of new housing to be provided, how it will be distributed around the county, and explains in general terms the vision for how new housing development should be provided in the future.

### The amount and distribution of housing

- H1 Provision will be made for about 37,300 additional dwellings (net) between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2016. The provision will be distributed as follows:

|                     | 2001 - 2016 |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Cherwell            | 9,350       |
| Oxford              | 6,500       |
| South Oxfordshire   | 7,500       |
| Vale of White Horse | 7,150       |
| West Oxfordshire    | 6,800       |
| Total               | 37,300      |

The main locations for new housing will be within Oxford (about 6,500 dwellings), Banbury (about 3,700 dwellings), Bicester (about 3,300 dwellings), Didcot (about 4,500 dwellings), Witney (about 3,000 dwellings), and Grove (about 2,100 dwellings).

Elsewhere, most development should take place in larger settlements where a reasonable range of employment, services and community facilities exist, are planned or can be provided at reasonable cost. Significant additional housing development, including inappropriate infill, should be avoided where this is likely to result largely in commuting by car to urban centres and where travel needs are unlikely to be well served by public transport. In small settlements and villages housing development will be limited to that required to meet local needs and support balanced communities in villages.

Local planning authorities should seek to maximise the proportion of new dwellings built on previously developed land in accordance with national and regional guidance, while maintaining total housing delivery at the levels required to fulfil the provision set out above.

Where appropriate, phasing will be used and the release of large sites managed so that priority is given to the development of previously developed land and buildings within urban areas, and land is released gradually throughout the plan period, and to ensure the provision of necessary supporting infrastructure, services and facilities and other improvements.

- 7.2 The overall amount of housing to be built is broadly in accordance with the annual average number of houses suggested in RPG9 of 2,430 dwellings per year 2001-2006. Regional guidance is being reviewed, and in the meantime the RPG9 building rate has been applied for the whole Plan period in accordance with Government advice.
- 7.3 The main focus for new housing development up to 2016 is the larger settlements which are considered to be the most sustainable locations due to their range of jobs, services and facilities and the opportunities to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport for journeys. A reasonable range of services and facilities will generally be taken to mean at least a primary school, food shop, post office, community facilities and good quality public transport, providing at least an hourly service. In small settlements and villages policy H1 allows for some limited development of an appropriate scale to support the needs of local communities in accordance with PPS7.
- 7.4 Didcot is close to the boundary between South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts. The alteration to the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 (adopted in April 2001) determined that the direction of growth for major development should be mainly to the west of the town, and divided the number of houses between the districts. The housing allocation for Didcot up to 2016 includes the major development of 3,200 dwellings already planned to the west of the town. The housing figures in policy H1 provide for about 4,000 of the dwellings to be built at Didcot within South Oxfordshire district, and about 500 within the Vale of White Horse district. Within these general parameters, the precise amount, location and boundaries of new development in and around the town is a matter for the district councils to determine.
- 7.5 Government policy is to maximise the amount of development which takes place on previously developed land and existing buildings and in the South East region to accommodate 60% of new housing in this way. A county wide assessment of the potential to accommodate housing on previously developed land and buildings in urban areas in Oxfordshire has estimated capacity to accommodate more than half the planned new housing on previously developed sites within settlements up to 2016. More could be identified in future and potential capacity will be kept under review. However, Oxfordshire is relatively less urbanised than other parts of the South East and does not have large areas of derelict land available which would enable the Government's target to be met. The County Council therefore considers that a target of at least 55% of new housing on previously developed sites within urban areas is appropriate and achievable up to 2016, and will monitor performance against this. This does not mean that important open spaces within towns will be developed -- they will be protected, and have not been taken into account in the housing assessment. However, this target is not a maximum and where higher percentages can be achieved in accordance with planning policies local planning authorities should aim to do so. In drawing up development proposals the possibility that previously developed land may be contaminated and any consequent need for remediation measures should be considered.