



6. Developing the local economy

Economic strategy

- 6.1 The Plan seeks to sustain prosperity by supporting sustainable and appropriate economic development. A successful economy is fundamental to ensuring that the quality of life in Oxfordshire is protected and improved. This does not mean encouraging indiscriminate economic growth but supporting investment in high value sectors that have low environmental impact, or 'smart' growth. The County Council will work with partners, including the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, to promote economic benefits to all sectors of society and to provide infrastructure that supports the demands of the economy.
- 6.2 This broad approach is reflected in the Regional Economic Strategy for South East England²⁴, and in particular, the Oxfordshire Economic Development Strategy²⁵. This strategy seeks to sustain and develop the county's educational, scientific and technological economy and to deliver continued economic prosperity through improved competitiveness and productivity, skills development, and job and firm creation, in a way that protects the county's important environmental assets.
- 6.3 Oxfordshire has a well integrated network of support for business, linking together industry, local government, private agencies and research and education institutes. New science, technology and business parks and centres provide a choice of locations for innovative companies and entrepreneurs who wish to benefit from proximity to a world class knowledge base.
- 6.4 The County Council approach is about building steadily on Oxfordshire's strengths and providing employment opportunities for local people, but not of a scale that encourages significant commuting into the area or which attracts large footloose firms or large warehousing and distribution facilities.

²⁴ Regional Economic Strategy for South East England 2002-2012, SEEDA.

²⁵ Oxfordshire Economic Development Strategy 2001-2005, Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, December 2001. The County Council is a member of the Partnership.

Provision for employment development

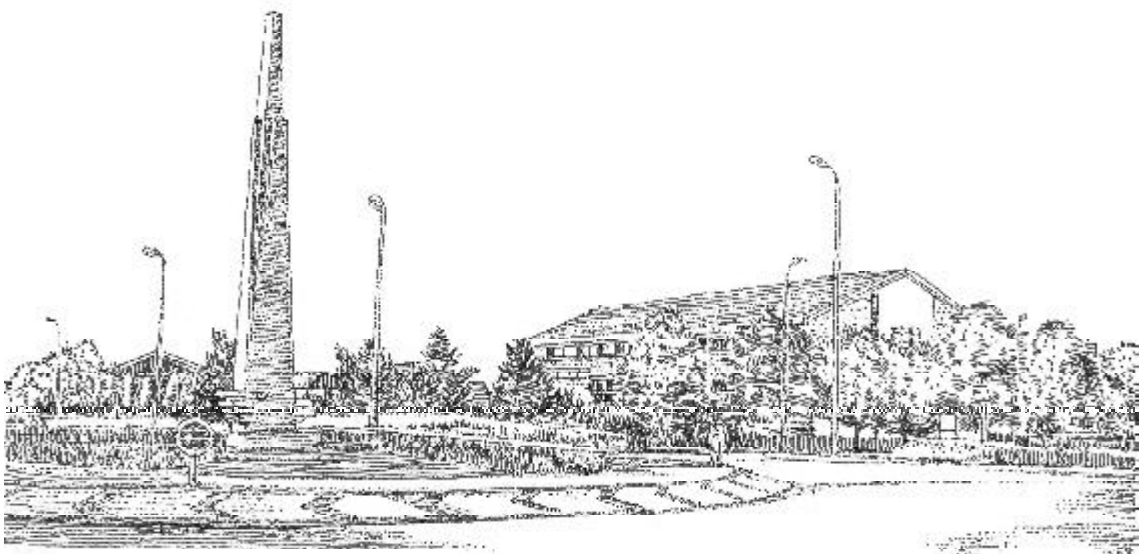
E1 Development for employment purposes should be located so as to meet the objectives and priorities of this Plan. In particular it should:

- provide for the requirements of activities which contribute to the regional and local priorities for economic development. This includes providing a range of accommodation for small businesses and innovation, skills development, business infrastructure and linkages within the knowledge based economy;
- be located mainly in or adjoining urban areas or in existing concentrations of employment with good accessibility from residential areas, particularly by non-car modes of transport;
- as far as practicable incorporate measures to encourage shorter journeys to work and travel on foot, by cycle or public transport;
- not be of a scale or character that gives rise to large increases in commuting in the area or low intensity uses of land which generate heavy traffic on local roads.

Priority should be given to development which supports educational, scientific and technological sectors and responds to the needs of established and emerging clusters within the county.

6.5 Policy E1 sets out the focus of the Plan's approach to economic development in line with the principles described in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4 above.

6.6 Within the context of the overall strategy as set out in policy G1, the role of the development plan in sustaining prosperity and supporting the local economy is to ensure that sufficient land is available in appropriate locations to meet the needs of small businesses – including for start ups and incubator space, existing firms and firms which need to be in Oxfordshire. This means a focus on development within larger urban areas and where employment generating development can contribute to reducing the need to travel and where walking, cycling and use of public transport can be encouraged.





- 6.7 A key objective is to support the development of Oxfordshire's existing and emerging growth sectors and clusters. The educational, scientific and technological industries and services are important both regionally and locally. To this end, the Plan proposes a strategy that provides for the growth of firms in this sector in the main urban areas, which will assist with the diversification of the economic base of the city and the main towns.
- 6.8 In its wider role, the County Council with its partners will seek to address employment related issues such as increasing the level of educational attainment, supporting learning and skills development and business support.

Oxford City

E2 In Oxford, development for employment uses will be expected to take place primarily on previously developed land or in conjunction with redevelopment schemes for mixed uses incorporating housing, town centre or other facilities. Development should have regard to the priorities set out in Policy E1 and to the objective of providing a range of accommodation for businesses in Oxford and contributing to the diversity of local employment opportunities, while maintaining or improving the balance between jobs and resident workforce in the city.

Where employment use of a site ceases, its future use should be assessed in the light of the above considerations, its suitability for alternative uses and whether there is a realistic prospect of it being re-used for employment purposes.

- 6.9 In Oxford, because the number of jobs is much greater than the resident workforce²⁶ causing substantial in-commuting and housing pressures, new land allocations for employment generating uses are not proposed. Rather, the approach is to make better use of existing developed land, through for example, redevelopment and intensification. Redevelopment schemes in the centre provide an opportunity for a mix of uses including the provision of new retail floorspace but also for employment and housing. The West End area of Oxford represents by far the most significant potential for new mixed use development where already schemes for conversion of the Prison and Castle Mound for hotel and cultural activity, and proposals for redevelopment of the Westgate shopping centre indicate significant intent to rejuvenate the area under the guidance of a partnership project between the County and City Councils with SEEDA.
- 6.10 Oxford is an important economic centre, significant in terms of the types of employment activity and presence of major employers. Policy E2 seeks to enable diversity of employment opportunities while providing for the necessary requirements of key sectors. Land is available in Oxford for new employment development including to meet university and hospital requirements. There is also potential for modernisation, intensification and change of use.
- 6.11 The planned consolidation and modernisation of Oxford's hospital activity over the Plan period will generate new transport pressures in the city. The health authorities should devise and fund measures to reduce car traffic and ensure appropriate access, particularly by public transport, in consultation with the County Council and others.

²⁶ Resident workforce includes people in employment and unemployed.



- 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.**

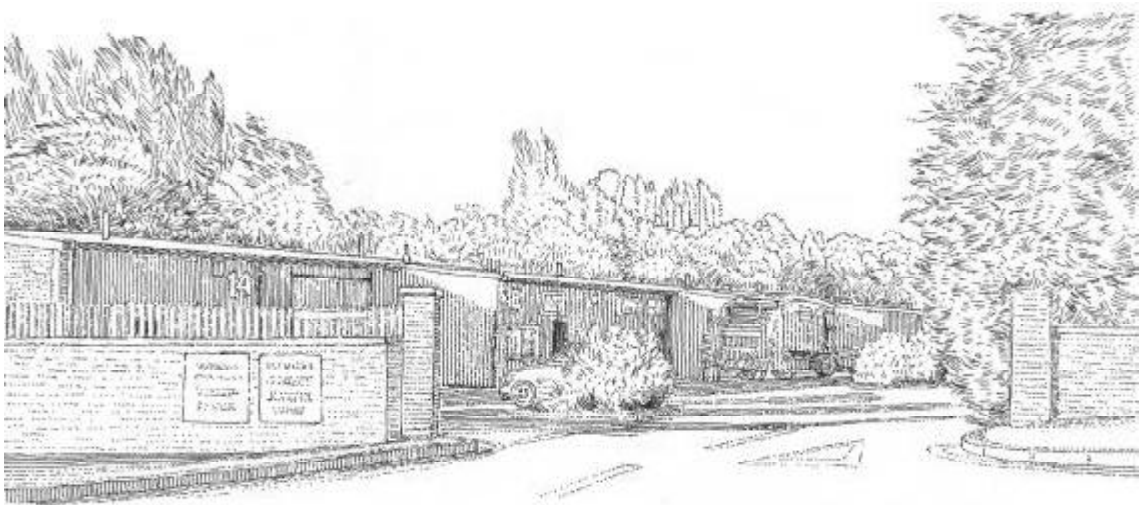
A limited amount of land for employment will be made available in Abingdon, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Henley, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Grove. In deciding on the amount of employment land available in the above towns, weight shall be given to the content of action plans that have been 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 healthchecks²⁷ 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.

²⁷ 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 alike²⁸.

²⁸ 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.