



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.



- 7.6 The location of housing development and rate of building will be monitored throughout the Plan period to assess the progress of the locational strategy and previously developed land target. This information will enable the County Council to advise the planning authorities on phasing to manage the release of larger housing sites to give priority to the re-use of previously developed land within urban areas.



Upper Heyford

- H2 a) Land at RAF Upper Heyford will provide for a new settlement of about 1000 dwellings and necessary supporting infrastructure, including a primary school and appropriate community, recreational and employment opportunities, as a means of enabling environmental improvements and the heritage interest of the site as a military base with Cold War associations to be conserved, compatible with achieving a satisfactory living environment.
- b) Proposals for development must reflect a revised comprehensive planning brief adopted by the district council and demonstrate that the conservation of heritage resources, landscape, restoration, enhancement of biodiversity and other environmental improvements will be achieved across the whole of the former air base in association with the provision of the new settlement.
- c) The new settlement should be designed to encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport rather than travel by private car. Improvements to bus and rail facilities and measures to minimise the impact of traffic generated by the development on the surrounding road network will be required.



- 7.7 Land declared surplus by the Ministry of Defence at the former airbase at Upper Heyford represents an opportunity to achieve an appropriate balance between environmental improvements to a rural part of Oxfordshire, conservation of the heritage interest from the Cold War, and re-use of some existing buildings and previously developed land located in the former technical and residential core area of the base. However, the scale of development must be appropriate to the location and surroundings. The County Council is opposed to the development of a large new settlement due to the site's relatively isolated and unsustainable rural location, the threat of urbanisation in a rural area, the location of the site in relation to Bicester with which it would compete for investment in services and facilities, and conflict with the objectives of Government planning policy in PPG13 to provide accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling and to reduce the need to travel by car²⁹. Therefore, the Plan provides for modest development of about 1,000 houses. There are about 300 existing houses on the site of which some or all could be retained or demolished, but the total limit of about 1,000 dwellings will be the determining factor. This proposal has been recognised by the First Secretary of State as 'an exception to normal sustainability objectives as a means of facilitating the remediation of the former airbase to enable the site to present a more environmentally acceptable face than it does now'³⁰.
- 7.8 Proposals for development must be in accordance with a revised comprehensive planning brief for the site adopted by Cherwell District Council. Care should be taken to ensure that the heritage interest of the site as an air base with Cold War associations, landscape restoration and biodiversity are all taken into account in deciding appropriate measures. In revising the comprehensive planning brief, the District Council should continue to consult English Heritage and the developer on how heritage conservation issues should be addressed, including treatment of buildings from the Cold War era that English Heritage have recommended for protection. A conservation plan for the whole area of the air base is being prepared by the District Council in partnership with English Heritage, to enable appropriate decisions to be reached in revising the comprehensive planning brief.
- 7.9 In drawing up development proposals attention should be paid to ensure a satisfactory living environment is provided for future residents. Proposals should be designed to a high quality in accordance with policy H3 and will need to provide for appropriate on- and off-site infrastructure to meet the needs of the development in accordance with policy G3, including primary and secondary education, library facilities, and public transport and other highway and transport improvements. Proposals should not provide for any further significant growth beyond that envisaged in policy H2.

²⁹ In June 2003 the Secretary of State refused permission for proposals for development of a settlement on the site because he considered that the scheme did not comply with the development plan. Cherwell District Council is to review the comprehensive planning brief to bring it up to date and to make it consistent with the Secretary of State's decision.

³⁰ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 23 June 2003, reference APP/C3105/A/02/1080800.



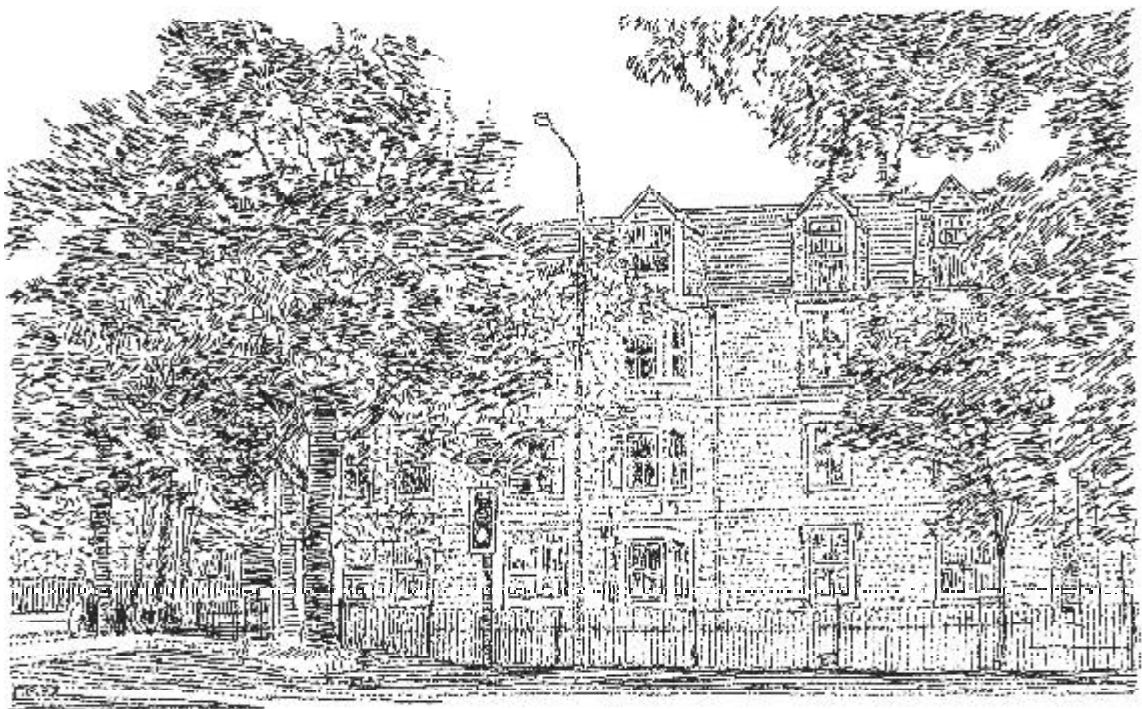
Design, quality and density of housing development

H3 Housing development should be at a density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare. Higher densities will be sought on sites within urban areas, close to town centres or where there is a good range of existing or planned services and facilities. Densities of at least 50 dwellings per hectare will be required in locations which are or can be well served by public transport. New housing development should:

- a) be designed to a high quality, taking into account the character of the site and surroundings; and
- b) include a variety of dwelling types and sizes to help create balanced communities and to meet the needs of all sections of the community, including small households.

Major urban extensions should be planned as mixed communities and should provide the services and facilities needed to support them and create safe and attractive places to live.

7.10 The average density of housing development built or planned in Oxfordshire in recent years has been about 25 dwellings per hectare. This is low compared to the densities of housing development which the Government wishes to see of between 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare. In Oxfordshire, increasing the density of housing development will make better use of land and will help reduce the amount of greenfield land needed for development.





- 7.11 Higher development densities need not mean high rise development or that the design and quality of development should be compromised. All proposals for development should aim for high quality of design and layout in order to raise the quality of urban areas and create attractive and safe areas in which to live. The design of new developments should promote community safety and help to prevent crime, for example through the "Secured by Design" initiative. Well designed and practical proposals for "car-free" housing areas and the creation of "Home Zones" within new residential development will be welcomed. Incorporation of energy efficiency and resource conservation measures including water conservation in new development is encouraged by policy G6.
- 7.12 Policy H3 encourages account to be taken of the needs of local communities for different types and sizes of dwellings, including the need for 2-3 bedroom houses and more dwellings for small households. The type and size of dwellings to be built will be determined by the local planning authorities according to local needs within the overall principles set out in this policy. Assessments of local housing need by the local planning authorities generally indicate that the greatest proportion of need is for smaller houses.
- 7.13 People's needs change over time, and there will always be a proportion of the population who have special requirements. Therefore, developers are encouraged to build a proportion of new housing developments to the "homes for life" standard. This allows people to stay in their homes longer and places less pressure on support services such as health and social care.
- 7.14 A significant number of new dwellings will be built in extensions to existing urban areas. The County Council's vision is that urban extensions should provide attractive and interesting places to live, where residents have access to the day-to-day services and facilities they need, and where they are able to walk, cycle or travel by public transport for at least most local journeys. They should be planned as mixed communities with a range of dwelling types and sizes according to local need. Local planning authorities are encouraged to prepare development briefs to provide more detailed guidance about how this will be achieved on specific sites.

Affordable housing

- H4 Provision shall be made in local plans or development frameworks and through the determination of applications for planning permission, for affordable housing including housing for key workers, at a level commensurate with the identified need for such housing in each District. The amount and size of site where provision will be sought will be determined by local planning authorities based on assessments of local need. Provision will normally be made on site and be subject to permanent and enforceable arrangements to ensure the benefits will be passed on to subsequent occupiers.**
- 7.15 The need for affordable housing is one of the most important issues currently facing Oxfordshire, and is the top priority of the Oxfordshire Community Partnership. Oxfordshire currently has the third highest house prices of counties in the South East outside London, and low levels of unemployment. The inability to recruit and retain workers threatens the ability to deliver public services and sustain prosperity in Oxfordshire. Being unable to afford suitable housing leads to social deprivation and reduced quality of life for people.



- 7.16 Affordable housing is defined as housing which meets the needs of people who cannot afford accommodation to rent or purchase on the open market which is suitable for their needs, including housing for rent, shared ownership or low cost market housing. People who may not be able to afford housing at market rates include key workers.
- 7.17 RPG9 suggests that about 48% of new dwellings built in the South East region need to be affordable. Local levels of housing need are assessed by the district councils to inform their housing strategies and local plan policies. The most recent surveys indicate levels of need for affordable housing far exceeding total housing supply. It would not be possible for all the new dwellings built in Oxfordshire to be affordable in order to meet the predicted level of need. Between 1996 to 2003, only 20% of dwellings built were affordable. Almost half of these were built in the rural areas of the county.
- 7.18 Given the levels of need in the county and the importance to the local economy and delivery of services of the ability to recruit and retain workers, the delivery of affordable housing will be monitored against the expectation that 50% of the additional housing provided in Oxfordshire should be affordable, including houses for key workers. This is consistent with the overall level of need indicated in RPG9. This will require a significant change from current levels of provision, which in turn will depend on major policy changes by the Government and other agencies and a significant increase in the funding available for affordable housing, over which the planning system has no influence. However, to assist local authorities in the Thames Valley, practical guidance on the delivery of affordable housing through the planning system has been published³¹.



³¹ Affordable Housing Practical Guide, Association of Councils in the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR), June 2003.



- 7.19 Circular 6/98 enables local planning authorities to consider whether circumstances in their areas justify seeking lower site size thresholds than 25 dwellings or 1 hectare for the provision of affordable housing. In rural areas in particular, development on small sites is a significant source of supply. The County Council will generally support the application by district councils through their local plans or local development frameworks of site thresholds lower than Circular 6/98 subject to evidence of local need, in order to help meet the overall need to provide more affordable housing in the county. Provision for affordable housing should normally be made on site to help create mixed communities. In considering the type and size of housing to be provided consideration should be given to the need for special needs or supported housing.
- 7.20 The level of need in Oxfordshire together with the limitations on funding available to deliver affordable housing, suggests that more innovative means of providing such housing will need to be found. The local planning authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek a contribution to meeting local affordable housing needs from commercial development, as well as from residential development. Consideration should also be given to innovative forms of ownership, such as co-operative housing developments, as a means of increasing the availability of affordable housing.
- 7.21 In rural areas, land within or adjoining settlements which would otherwise be considered inappropriate for development, may be released to provide affordable housing provided it is available in perpetuity to meet local needs, which is normally secured through planning conditions or obligations, and the need is justified by a local needs assessment. At the level of a particular village or parish, a needs assessment may be undertaken by the district council or local council.