



1. Introduction

What is the Oxfordshire Structure Plan?

- 1.1 The Oxfordshire Structure Plan is the County Council's strategy for the development and use of land in Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 The Structure Plan consists of a written statement of the County Council's policies illustrated by a key diagram. The Plan is supported by explanatory text (the "explanatory memorandum"), which is the remainder of the document. The strategy is in chapter 2 and the policies which support it in the subsequent chapters. The Plan should read as a whole, in conjunction with relevant local plans and local development documents.
- 1.3 This is the last Structure Plan to be adopted for Oxfordshire. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act was enacted in 2004. The Oxfordshire Structure Plan will eventually be replaced under the new system by the South East Plan which will provide the strategic framework to guide development in Oxfordshire¹.

The role of the development plan

- 1.4 Structure plans provide the strategic policy framework for the development and use of land. They should ensure that the provision for development is realistic and consistent with national and regional policy.
- 1.5 The County Council in reviewing the Plan has taken account of Government policy set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), Minerals Planning Guidance Notes (MPGs), Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) and other guidance, which are referred to throughout the Plan. The overall aims and objectives of the Plan, which are set out below, have been drawn up taking into account the Government's sustainable development objectives².
- 1.6 In particular it is recognised that climate change is one the major environmental challenges facing the world. The strategy in the Plan seeks at a local level to contribute to the mitigation of the causes and impacts of climate change.

¹ The South East Plan is being prepared by the South East of England Regional Assembly. It will contain sub-regional policies for parts of Oxfordshire, covering some of the issues addressed by the structure plans. Local plans will be replaced by local development documents prepared by the district councils for all matters except minerals and waste, which will be covered by a development document prepared by the County Council. Structure plans that had reached the statutory deposit stage by the Act's commencement date continued to adoption with such plans being saved for three years from adoption. Policies will then be replaced by revisions to the new Regional Spatial Strategy.

² A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development in the UK.



- 1.7 The Government aims to create sustainable communities³ in which people want to live which:
- are economically prosperous;
 - have decent homes at a price people can afford;
 - safeguard the countryside;
 - enjoy a well-designed, accessible and pleasant living and working environment; and
 - are effectively and fairly governed with a strong sense of community.
- 1.8 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9)⁴ provides the framework for development and the preparation of structure and local plans in the South East region up to 2016.
- 1.9 Key aspects of RPG9 which are relevant to Oxfordshire are:
- urban areas should be the main focus for development;
 - an average of 2,430 new dwellings should be provided in Oxfordshire each year;
 - high value-added activities including business clusters should be encouraged;
 - at the regional level 60% of new development should be on previously developed land;
 - greenfield development should normally take place only after other alternatives have been considered;
 - the development of housing should provide a better mix of sizes, types and tenures;
 - development should be located and designed to enable more sustainable use of natural resources and assist in reducing pollution;
 - there should be continued protection and enhancement of the region's biodiversity, landscape and built and historic heritage;
 - the life of the countryside and rural communities should be sustained through economic diversification; and
 - there should be increased ability to meet travel needs through safe walking, cycling and public transport with reduced reliance on the car.

Improving the quality of life in Oxfordshire

- 1.10 Oxfordshire is a diverse county, recognised as one of Europe's leading centres of enterprise and innovation, as a centre for culture and for the quality of its attractive countryside and historic towns and villages. It is best described as a "city region" in which Oxford and the rest of the county are closely interlinked and interdependent.
- 1.11 The Oxfordshire economy is one of the most successful and dynamic in the country. Oxfordshire is acknowledged globally as a centre of excellence for learning and research, with some of the world's foremost academic institutions and major research and development organisations, with strong linkages between research and business across the county.

³ "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future" is a national programme of action setting out how the Government intends to achieve sustainable communities for all. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.

⁴ Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), Government Office for the South East, March 2001.



- 1.12 Oxford with its two universities, hospitals and research establishments plays a central role in the economy of Oxfordshire. Many other important research establishments are in other parts of the county, for example Culham Science Centre and the Harwell International Business Centre for Science and Technology. A large number of the companies in the research sector are outside Oxford.
- 1.13 Economic success is fundamental to the quality of life in Oxfordshire. However, it also brings problems such as high house prices, lack of affordable housing, traffic congestion, recruitment and retention problems and pressures on the environment. There are pockets of deprivation and poverty in many communities, including rural areas where there can be greater isolation, limited public transport and poor access to services and jobs.
- 1.14 The County Council's priorities are set out in the Oxfordshire Plan⁵. The aim is to improve the quality of life of Oxfordshire's people by helping them to fulfil their potential; protecting the environment; safeguarding our communities; sustaining prosperity and raising the performance of the Council to improve services and promote Oxfordshire's interests in the region, nationally and in Europe.



⁵ Oxfordshire Plan 2005-2006, Oxfordshire County Council.



- 1.15 Healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities can only be achieved with involvement by the people who live and work in those communities. The Government sees local strategic partnerships (LSPs) as key to developing new ways of involving local people, the voluntary sector and business in identifying and implementing changes to improve their quality of life. The Oxfordshire Community Partnership⁶ has prepared a Community Strategy for Oxfordshire. Key priorities for action include increasing the provision of affordable housing, transport and safe and supportive communities.
- 1.16 A priority for the County Council is to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth by supporting the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership strategy to sustain and develop the educational, scientific and technological economy, working with major employers and business to provide affordable housing and with the farming community.
- 1.17 The Economic Development Strategy for Oxfordshire⁷ aims to raise Oxfordshire's profile as a pioneering, world-class economy that fulfils the potential of its inhabitants through continually developing its capacity for innovation, business and personal development, research and education, and through the effective management of its high quality environmental resources. The Strategy recognises that economic growth can only be sustainable if it goes hand in hand with protecting and enhancing the county's environmental assets, which include three areas of outstanding natural beauty, Oxford – a city of international historic importance, attractive towns and villages, historic buildings and important sites for wildlife and nature conservation.
- 1.18 The Structure Plan will contribute to meeting the County Council's priorities, by providing a land use and transport planning framework which meets the needs of Oxfordshire's people and economy, whilst protecting its environment and heritage, and which contributes to the economic success and prosperity of the county.
- 1.19 The County Council's vision for Oxfordshire over the next twenty to twenty five years is of a county where the natural, historical and cultural environment continues to be protected and enhanced, and where the quality of life of all Oxfordshire's people will be improved. Oxfordshire's role as a centre of excellence for learning and research will be supported by a pattern of development which sustains the prosperity of the economy, meets needs for housing, including affordable housing and provides for a choice of travel options less dependent on the car.

⁶ A partnership of all main stakeholders in Oxfordshire from the public, private, voluntary and community sector.

⁷ Economic Development Strategy Oxfordshire 2001-2005. Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, December 2001.



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 paper⁸.
- 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.

⁸ Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 Deposit Draft, Sustainability Appraisal, September 2003.