

## **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **South East plan: District Housing Distribution**

#### **Central Oxfordshire Sub-regional Strategy – Main Report**

##### **Introduction**

This annex represents the main advice to SEERA on the sub-regional strategy, policies and district level housing distribution for submission to SEERA for incorporation into the South East Plan. It is an amendment to section E7 of the draft South East Plan published for consultation by SEERA in January 2005.

##### **Central Oxfordshire**

##### **Preface**

1. The extent of the area is shown on map E7. It includes all or part of the following administrative areas; Oxford City, Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire Districts in Oxfordshire. The settlement pattern of the sub-region is distinctive, with the historic city of Oxford at its centre surrounded by Green Belt and some substantial country towns beyond.
2. The key features of particular significance for the sub-region include:
  - the unique potential of the sub-region's dynamic and innovative economy, including its role as an international centre for education and innovation
  - congestion on road and rail, and the need to strengthen the public transport network, and promote alternatives to car and lorry traffic
  - requirements for physical, social and economic infrastructure to address historic backlogs in provision and to provide for new economic and housing growth
  - the need to improve housing availability and affordability
  - the need to protect the character and setting of the city of Oxford and environmental quality of the sub-region which is highly valued
  - the need to accommodate development in a sustainable way, meeting social and economic needs while protecting and enhancing the environment and ensuring the wise use of resources.

The overall strategy for the sub-region in section C of the South East Plan reflects these characteristics.

##### **Spatial strategy**

3. The strategy seeks to build on the strengths of the sub-region, realising opportunities for further growth while protecting and enhancing the natural, historic and cultural environment. Central Oxfordshire has distinctive characteristics on which its success is built that must be maintained and enhanced. The Central Oxfordshire economy (especially the high value end) is largely founded on the universities, spin offs, research campuses and publishing. This workforce is attracted and retained in part due to the sub-region's heritage, green spaces, areas of outstanding natural beauty and varied and beautiful villages and towns. It is important to provide employment land for such uses; there is less need to provide for activities such as warehousing and distribution. It is equally essential that housing and other growth does not ruin the heritage which is part of Central Oxfordshire's appeal to such businesses and their workers.

4. To achieve this most new development is focused at the towns of Bicester, Didcot and Wantage & Grove. These towns and surrounding areas are regarded as relatively free of physical constraints, with the potential to generate employment and/or are near to centres of potential employment growth. They are well located in terms of existing transport networks provided that these are upgraded to support development. At Bicester there are opportunities for significant public transport improvements such as East- West rail that could help to make the town an attractive location for business. Although Oxford has the largest number of jobs in Central Oxfordshire, there is also a concentration of employment in the south of the sub-region that is reflected in the spatial strategy. Housing development at Didcot and Wantage & Grove will help meet the demand for labour in this area. A significant amount of new homes will also be built within Oxford, to make best use of previously developed land, help meet the needs for housing in the city and make use of good local public transport and opportunities for cycling.
5. Continued growth will require the provision of infrastructure in a timely fashion necessary to support growth and address past under-provision. Growth also needs to be linked to providing for high value added research and science based employment with improving opportunities for travel by public transport to employment areas. To minimise the pressures on transport, in-commuting and house prices this needs to be matched by a policy for improving education and skills.

## **POLICY CO1 CORE STRATEGY**

**The strategy for Central Oxfordshire is to provide for development to deliver the housing requirements of this plan and to build on the sub-region's economic strengths particularly in education, science and technology in ways which will:**

- **ensure the provision of infrastructure which is essential to the proper functioning and future development of the area**
- **protect and enhance the environment and quality of life of the sub-region**
- **protect the setting and character of Oxford**
- **make best use of previously developed land within urban areas to reduce the need for greenfield development**
- **concentrate development where the need to travel particularly by car can be reduced.**

**The main locations for development will be Bicester, Didcot, and Wantage & Grove and within the built up area of Oxford.**

**Elsewhere limited development will be permitted to support the social and economic well-being of local communities.**

### **Housing Distribution**

6. The plan requires that provision should be made in Central Oxfordshire for 1,700 new dwellings per year, and 660 new dwellings per year for the rest of Oxfordshire, a total annual requirement of 2,360 dwellings. The housing distribution proposed in policy CO2 allows for about 4,300 new dwellings to be built at Bicester, about 7,300 at Didcot, and about 3,400 at Wantage & Grove from 2006 to 2026 in line with the spatial strategy in policy CO1. Due to administrative boundaries the number of houses proposed to be built at Didcot 2016-2026 has been split equally between South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts until more detailed work establishes the most appropriate general location to enable an informed division to be made. This should include a strategic flood risk assessment of the areas surrounding the town in accordance with policy NRM3.

## POLICY CO2 SCALE AND DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING

Provision will be made for 1,700 additional dwellings per year in Central Oxfordshire and for 660 additional dwellings per in the rest of Oxfordshire for the period 2006 to 2026. The provision will be distributed as follows:

District	Central Oxfordshire 2006-2026	Rest of Oxfordshire 2006-2026	District Total 2006-2026
Cherwell	5,800	6,000	11,800
Oxford	7,000	N/a	7,000
South Oxfordshire	7,500*	2,700^	10,200
Vale of White Horse	10,500*	1,000	11,500
West Oxfordshire	3,200	3,500	6,700
<b>Totals</b>	<b>34,000</b>	<b>13,200</b>	<b>47,200</b>

\* New housing to be accommodated within the area of South Oxfordshire that is within the Western corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region of about 10 dwellings per year is included within the figure for the rest of the county.

\* About 3,000 dwellings are proposed at Didcot 2016 – 2026. For illustrative purposes this has been split equally between South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts.

### Green Belt

7. The Green Belt was conceived in the 1950s and its general extent was set at that time. The special character of Oxford and its landscape setting means not just the University and the views of the dreaming spires, but a broader concept including the countryside around the City, the Cherwell and Thames floodplains, and the relationship of nearby settlements to Oxford.

### POLCY CO3: GREEN BELT

A green belt will be maintained around Oxford to:

- preserve the special character and landscape setting of Oxford
- check the growth of Oxford and prevent ribbon development and urban sprawl
- prevent the coalescence of settlements
- assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Development in the Green Belt will only be permitted if it maintains its openness and does not conflict with the purpose of the Green Belt or harm its visual amenities.

### Affordable housing

8. Housing affordability generally, and the provision of affordable housing, is a key issue for the sub-region. Recent housing needs surveys have shown affordable housing needs to be more than the amount of development planned. This is reflected in the challenging target for

provision of affordable housing in all new development. The proportion of affordable housing that is for rent and other forms of tenure such as shared ownership will be a matter for the district councils to determine according to the needs identified.

#### **POLICY CO4: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**At least 50% of all new housing in the sub-region should be affordable, including housing for key workers. 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 to subsequent occupiers.**

#### **Economy**

9. The dynamic and varied economy of the sub-region is one of its key characteristics and strengths. Sectors most important to Oxfordshire are education, health, knowledge-intensive and high technology businesses, motorsport, car manufacture, publishing, retail and tourism. Sectors particularly expected to grow are education, and science and technology. Policy CO5 provides for continued growth and guides development to locations identified to accommodate new housing to increase and diversify the economic and employment base, provide an environment to encourage investment and attempt to reduce the need for long distance commuting.
10. Bicester and Didcot have strong rail links to London and other neighbouring centres. Both towns are well placed to capture and realise the potential of the sub-region and have the best potential transport links to support clusters of high value employment. Concerted action will be needed by a range of organisations to ensure this happens, particularly by developing the economic base of both towns, and by guarding against the risk of them simply acting as dormitories.
11. Bicester is well located for research related activities needing strategic rail and road access, including to Oxford, and could benefit from East-West rail and contribute to wider economic development of the 'Oxford to Cambridge Arc'. To help make Bicester an attractive location for higher value sectors, a local economic and marketing strategy for Bicester focusing on business improvement (attracting inward investment and development) together with improvements of services and facilities, could be developed. The science and technology sector is often associated with a corridor of activity including Oxford to major employment sites in the south of the county. Being in the Oxford-Cambridge arc means Bicester being seen as part of the Oxford story, not outside it.
12. Didcot is already in a general area in the south of the sub-region of a concentration of established science based and high value businesses with potential for continued growth and investment at sites such as Harwell International Business Centre, Milton Park and Didcot. There is potential at these sites to support many additional jobs. The Diamond Synchrotron Project is one example that represents a major investment in the local economy providing a major new science research facility.
13. The city of Oxford provides a diversity of economic opportunities and has a world renowned name and reputation, attracting investment in a range of high value activities. As the number of jobs in the City is much greater than the resident workforce causing substantial in-commuting and housing pressures, the approach is to encourage the efficient use of existing land, through for example, redevelopment and intensification, rather than releasing new land. 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.

14. In its wider role, and to address factors that can adversely affect Oxfordshire's economy, the County Council with its partners will seek to address employment related issues such as increasing the level of educational attainment across the county, supporting learning and skills development and business support.

## **POLICY CO5: ECONOMY**

**Development for employment purposes should provide for the requirements of activities which contribute to 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.**

**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.**

**The main locations for the provision of additional land for employment will be at Bicester and Didcot, in particular to provide for the expansion and relocation of existing local firms and those in the sectors referred to above.**

**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. In the city centre, development which maintains and enhances the sub-regional role and diversity of the centre will be permitted, provided it is consistent with the protection of Oxford's architectural and historic heritage.**

## **Transport**

15. Transport investment has failed to keep up with housing growth in Central Oxfordshire. It is critical to the sub-region's economy and further growth that this backlog and future pressures linked to proposed housing growth are addressed. In particular, the City of Oxford's function as a regional transport hub requires improved access, especially by public transport, and will need to be accompanied by measures to reduce congestion along key corridors.
16. Premium bus routes with frequent, high quality services will also be needed to link the country towns to Oxford, supported by bus priority measures and remote park and ride. There is also a need for improved rail services on the A34 corridor, particularly as this is unlikely to be widened and the Government is considering demand management measures. East West Rail is crucial to linking the sub-region to Milton Keynes and supporting economic development at Bicester. So is enhanced capacity at Oxford station (linked to essential resignalling work), if this busy rail corridor is to cope with growth in passenger and freight traffic in the face of limited capacity on A34.
17. Access to Oxford will also require junction improvements where radial roads meet the Oxford ring road, supported by improved management on key road corridors like the A34 and A40, for example through real time information. Local road and junction improvements are also required in the country towns to cater for recent and ongoing housing growth, including Didcot, Grove, Witney, Bicester and Banbury. Improvements to A415, particularly the Marcham bypass, will provide an improved alternative to the A34 and A40 radial routes.

## **POLICY CO6: TRANSPORT**

**Oxfordshire County Council will promote the effective management and development of transport networks in Central Oxfordshire. This will be done in order to meet both strategic and local access requirements while reducing the need to travel in particular by car or lorry. Access to Oxford from major towns in the sub-region and from neighbouring sub-regions will be a priority**

### **Infrastructure**

18. Infrastructure includes social and cultural as well as physical infrastructure and also affordable housing. Much of the significant growth that has occurred in the sub-region over the last 40 years has been without commensurate upgrading of supporting infrastructure. Development will need to be accompanied by a package of investment in infrastructure in its widest sense that matches the level and phasing of future growth and addresses any backlog. The timely delivery of infrastructure means that it should be made in advance of and phased with new development and demand.
19. In addition to transport infrastructure referred to above, other infrastructure needs include the provision of many more affordable homes in the sub-region and the provision of a range of services, such as schools, libraries, community health services (which are in many cases declining rather than improving), local transport measures and 'green' infrastructure (that is the green spaces that contributes to a high quality natural and built environment, for example, public open space and recreational facilities). There will be a need for significant investment in water supply and, in certain locations, waste-water treatment. The improvement of attractions and town centre facilities for Didcot and Bicester in particular, will be required to provide them with what is required for the size of town they will become. To assist with the planning and delivery of infrastructure an infrastructure and investment programme will be developed to support development.

## **POLICY C06: INFRASTRUCTURE**

**The planning authorities will ensure that infrastructure needed to support development in the sub-region is identified and delivered in time to meet the needs of the population they will be serving. Future development will be contingent on this. An infrastructure and investment programme will identify infrastructure requirements for the sub-region. This will be regularly reviewed to ensure infrastructure is delivered where and when it is needed.**

### **Implementation**

20. The success of the sub-regional strategy will ultimately depend upon the commitment of national, regional and local agencies to its implementation. The strategic policies need to be translated into more detailed policies, action plans and crucially investment programmes. The range of mechanisms needed to deliver the strategy are set out in the following table:

Policy	Delivery mechanism	Lead Roles	Support Roles
CO1 – Core strategy		See specific policies below	
CO2 – Scale and distribution of housing	Local development documents	District councils	County Council Infrastructure providers Regional Assembly
CO3 – Green belt	Local development	Local authorities	Regional Assembly

	documents Planning decisions		GOSE
CO4 – Affordable housing	Local development documents Planning decisions Funding schemes	Local authorities Housing associations	Regional Assembly GOSE Regional Housing Board
CO5 - Economy	Local development documents Planning decisions Local economic and marketing strategies Skills development initiatives	Local authorities Local strategic partnerships SEEDA Economic Partnership	Private sector Universities
CO6 - Transport	Phasing of provision with new development Local transport plan	Local authorities Highway authority Highways Agency Rail industry Network Rail	TOCs Bus companies SEEDA Regional Assembly
CO7 - Infrastructure	Phasing of provision with new development Local development documents Planning decisions Developer contributions and sectoral funding mechanisms	Local authorities Infrastructure providers Central government Developers	Highways agency Water companies and OFWAT Strategic Health Authority Local strategic partnerships SEEDA Regional Assembly

## Monitoring

21. Monitoring the sub-regional strategy will be carried out using the indicators in the following table:

Indicator	Availability of data	Source	Frequency
Total population	Yes – by ward	OCC – data observatory	Census – every 10 years, plus annual updates from the small area forecasts
% change in workplace based employment	Yes – by ward	OCC – travel to work data	Census – every 10 years, plus annual updates from the ONS annual business inquiry*
Amount of floorspace	Yes – by parish	OCC – Land development and	Annual

developed for employment by type		progress system	
Employment land available by type	Yes – by parish	OCC – Land development and progress system	Annual
Amount of employment land lost to residential development	Yes – by parish	OCC – Land development and progress system	Annual
Housing trajectory showing: i) net additional dwellings for the current year	Yes – by parish	OCC – Land development and progress system	Annual
ii) projected net additional dwellings up to the end of the RSS period or over a 10 year period from its adoption, whichever is the longer	Yes – by parish	District councils – annual monitoring report	Annual
iii) the annual net additional dwelling requirement	Yes – by parish	District councils – annual monitoring report	Annual
iv) annual average number of net additional dwellings needed to meet overall housing requirements, having regard to previous year's performance	Yes – by parish	District councils – annual monitoring report	Annual
Affordable housing completions	Yes – by parish	OCC – land development progress system in consultation with district councils	Annual
Access to work and hospitals	Yes – by any geographic area	OCC – transport accession software	Periodic
Land area (ha) of green belt	Yes	OCC – GIS map overlay	If green belt is reviewed through local development frameworks

\*Some data may be restricted as a result of ONS policy on data disclosure.