



# **Where should all the new housing go?**

**Background information  
to the  
South East Plan consultation**

**Feasibility Study Update**

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**OXFORDSHIRE  
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**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY**  
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# **SOUTH EAST PLAN FEASIBILITY STUDY UPDATE ON OXFORDSHIRE'S MAIN TOWNS**

## **Introduction**

This background paper provides a summary assessment of the feasibility work undertaken on the main towns in Oxfordshire. The purpose of feasibility assessment is to identify the potential for the towns around the county to accommodate new large scale development.

Work undertaken for the South East Plan builds on the feasibility studies undertaken for the Oxfordshire Structure Plan review 2016 and other work such as monitoring.

Work on feasibility is on-going with further assessments on infrastructure issues in progress. Statements on infrastructure below are therefore subject to checking and confirmation and will be incorporated and ready for submission to the South East Regional Assembly in December.

The settlements covered in this document relate to: i) in Central Oxfordshire the larger settlements beyond the green belt; and ii) in the rest of the county the main urban settlements.

## **Central Oxfordshire**

### **Bicester**

There is land for growth at Bicester to meet housing requirements in the north of the county subject to infrastructure provision, strategic transport links and the creation of higher value employment opportunities.

The town could accommodate the amount of development proposed under the alternatives being considered as it is largely free of environmental constraints. All potential development locations lie beyond the perimeter road. Any development at the high end of what is proposed (under Distribution 1) would need more than one growth location.

Bicester has good access to the M40 and A34, two rail stations and premium bus route services to Oxford. As the A34 to Oxford is congested, longer term this route is identified to benefit from a bus priority scheme including remote park and ride. Building up the employment base is a key issue if this town were to continue to see further development. Reversing significant out-commuting and attracting a better mix of economic activity is likely to require one or more major developers and/or employers. The east west rail line would provide a necessary stimulus for this sort of employment generating development linked to the concept of The Oxford/Cambridge arc (including improving line speed and frequency which requires upgrading between Oxford and Bicester). The town would then be exceptionally well placed for research related activities and high value added employment sites needing strategic rail access and road access.

In terms of essential infrastructure, large scale development beyond 2016 would generate a need for a community hospital, secondary and primary school provision, local recreation facilities, leisure facilities, town centre improvements, water supply and sewage treatment upgrades before further significant growth could be contemplated. A replacement library for Bicester is also a priority of the County Council.

## **Didcot**

Land for development is available to serve the south of the county but the potential for development at the higher level of growth being considered requires further examination. There is significant job growth potential in the town and at Milton Park and Harwell – also on potentially surplus land at Didcot Power Station. Strategic transport links and areas of relatively unconstrained land make this town favourable for continued development.

The development potential for housing at Didcot is subject to further analysis. Growth at the higher end (4000 dwellings) may require the identification of two locations. The Environment Agency has recently notified the Council of areas of flood risk around the town that require their investigation and may need to be avoided. Didcot has not consistently delivered housing numbers at the higher end (400 dwellings per annum) but achieving and maintaining such levels is possible given the momentum from employment potential in the area.

In terms of essential infrastructure, large-scale development beyond 2016 would require upgrades/expansion of the sewage treatment works as this is near capacity. Additional secondary school capacity and primary provision would be required, plus a community hospital and health facilities and further town centre services and facilities.

In relation to transport, issues are significant and need to be resolved, including what infrastructure is necessary. DIDITS Phase 2 schemes to relieve Milton Interchange and Harwell village are included. Strategic road links to Oxford (A34) are increasingly congested and the Highways Agency has objected to existing proposals for housing growth at Didcot. The railway is also operating at capacity.

## **Wantage and Grove**

Wantage & Grove could provide homes to meet housing requirement to serve an expanding employment base in southern Oxfordshire. These settlements are not so dependent on the A34 for movement as the other main towns in the county. Development here could re-vitalise Wantage town centre, boost facilities in Grove and would strengthen the case for the re-opening of Grove Station, although this would need the support of the railway industry.

Under Distribution 2 Wantage & Grove would accommodate up to 2000 dwellings (including 750 already planned at Grove Airfield after 2016). Areas of land exist that are free from environmental constraints to accommodate this level of development. Build rates would need to reach about 200 per annum to achieve this level of development. Past rates have not been high but it has not had large-scale growth to accommodate previously.

The settlements currently lack an adequate local employment base to meet the level of labour available. However, there is employment potential in the wider area – at Didcot, Milton Park and Harwell – which housing growth could serve.

Wantage and Grove have relatively poor transport links that need to be addressed, in particular improvements to public transport services to support the strategic role of Wantage & Grove. Development would boost the proposed premium bus route to Oxford and Abingdon. Further improvements would be needed to develop the bus route linking Wantage and Grove to Didcot, Harwell and Milton Park. The re-opening of Grove rail station would also be a key consideration.

In terms of essential infrastructure there would be a requirement for a larger new secondary school, local services and facilities. Other infrastructure requirements are being examined including the need for sewage treatment works.

## **Witney**

Witney is an attractive market town which owes much of the character of its setting to the River Windrush and its valley. A higher number of dwellings identified on previously developed land means that the allocation at North Curbridge is now unlikely to commence until after 2006. There may be some residual capacity at North Curbridge to accommodate a further 400 houses post 2016. Relatively unconstrained land could be identified to the north or east of the town.

Witney is well connected to the A40 and premium bus route services to Oxford, but is not served by rail. Although there is a draft strategy to improve transport links along the A40, the significant level of congestion on this route is a serious problem and affects the premium bus network too. Development would have an impact on local landscape character. Travel to work data shows a good balance between jobs and labour in the town but job growth has not been as strong as resident growth, a gap which could worsen if further housing was not matched by sufficient employment growth. The scale of any future development would be limited by the capacity of the secondary schools to expand, and improvements to services and facilities in the town would need to be sought, including sewage treatment pumps if further growth occurred here. In terms of water supply, Thames Water would not support increases in housing until the main Worsham reservoir is completed in 2008. Overall, longer term development here should not be considered until the transport situation is improved.

## **Wallingford**

Wallingford is a small historic market town on the edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Wallingford has a range of services and facilities. It will be served by premium route bus services and has access to the main highway network.

Development at Wallingford could enhance the town's role as a local service centre. The town is heavily constrained by flood plain, high grade agricultural land, and the AONB. It would be difficult to develop without avoiding high quality agricultural land in particular. The secondary school is at capacity.

## **Main settlements in the rest of the county**

### **Banbury**

As the second largest settlement in Oxfordshire Banbury has a good range of shops, leisure facilities and jobs. Banbury has a station with good mainline rail services and access to the M40. The secondary schools in the town have capacity to expand. Possible locations for urban extensions could be identified in most directions around the town, but it would be difficult to avoid good quality agricultural land. Development would have an impact on the local landscape, particularly those locations on rising or high ground. The gaps between Banbury and nearby settlements could be threatened. Banbury generates the lowest amount of travel per person for journeys to work after Oxford, and existing bus routes within the town could be extended to serve most potential development locations. However, the road network within the town is operating at capacity, with no medium term prospects of improvements. The capacity of primary schools in the town and the supply of water resources to Banbury are further constraints. Overall, given the constraints, Banbury has limited opportunity for new growth beyond the built limits of the town.

## **Carterton**

Carterton is the second largest town in West Oxfordshire district, and lies adjacent to RAF Brize Norton which provides a significant number of jobs for the town. There are areas of land free of strategic environmental constraints.

Further housing development at Carterton could encourage improvements to the town centre and other facilities (themes highlighted by the Carterton Healthcheck 2003), and the secondary school has capacity for expansion. However, development could risk coalescence of Carterton with nearby villages. Carterton is served by premium bus route services to Witney and Oxford, but does not have direct access to the strategic road network. There are fewer jobs than resident workforce, and an increase in traffic on the surrounding rural road network and on the A40 to Oxford would be likely.

## **Chipping Norton**

Chipping Norton is a small traditional Cotswold market town with a good range of services and facilities. It is not served by a premium bus route, but has an hourly bus service. Chipping Norton is an important local employment centre, and has traditionally maintained a good balance of jobs and local work force but the closure of a key employer, Parker Knoll, in 2004 may have affected this balance. It is otherwise in a remote location in the north west of the county, some distance from main centres of employment. Although it lies on the edge of the Cotswolds AONB, there are areas of unconstrained land to the east of the town.

Development at Chipping Norton could enhance the town's role as a local service and employment centre, and the areas of unconstrained land would be accessible to employment areas and schools. However, development could affect the Cotswold setting of the town, and there are problems of low water pressure. The A44 suffers from congestion approaching Oxford and there are limited public transport services.

## **Faringdon**

Faringdon is a small market town with a range of services and facilities. It is not served by a premium route bus service, but has an hourly bus service and is close to the A420. It is constrained by good quality agricultural land, but there are areas of unconstrained land to the west and south west.

Development at Faringdon could enhance the town's role as a local service centre. However, large scale development could have a detrimental impact on the landscape setting of the town, including the gap between Faringdon and the A420 bypass. It is likely that development would increase commuting and travel by car. Proximity to Swindon may mean that Faringdon has difficulty attracting employment development to match new housing. The secondary school has no spare capacity.

## **Henley on Thames**

Henley is an historic town and local employment centre with a good range of services and facilities. It lies within the Chilterns AONB, and is constrained by the River Thames and its' flood plain. Henley is not served by a premium bus route service but is served by a branch rail line.

Development in Henley would provide an opportunity to secure affordable housing which is needed in the town, and there is some capacity for expansion at the secondary school. However, a significant proportion of people travel to work outside the county, mainly by car, and the main roads serving Henley, including the bridge, regularly suffer traffic congestion. Development

opportunities adjoining the town are severely limited - there are no significant areas of unconstrained land.

## **Thame**

Thame is an historic market town with a good range of services and facilities. There are significant environmental constraints, in particular land at risk of flooding associated with the River Thame and good quality agricultural land, although there is unconstrained land to the south east of the town. It is not served by a premium bus route service but is on the half hourly Oxford-Aylesbury bus route.

Thame is an important local employment centre and has more jobs than resident workforce yet generates a high proportion of car travel for work journeys. This suggests that housing development may further encourage longer distance car commuting rather than serve local needs. Development could affect the landscape setting of the town. The secondary school is at capacity.