

Local Plan Preferred Options

15 Minute neighbourhoods background paper

1. Introduction

The vision in 2040 is that Oxford will be a healthy and inclusive city, with strong communities that benefit from equal opportunities for everyone, not only in housing, but also to nature, to employment, social and leisure opportunities and to healthcare.

This paper focuses on the 15-minute neighbourhood/city concept. It builds on the 'Community and Cultural Facilities', 'Grey and Digital Infrastructure' and 'Retail' topic papers prepared and published for the Issues consultation in Summer 2021. These papers set out the relevant national, regional and local policy context; as well as highlighting some potential approaches that could be pursued in developing new policies for the Local Plan 2040. This paper should be considered as a continuation of these earlier Issues papers, so material will not be repeated here.

2. Context including feedback from Issues consultation

2.1 Summary of 2021 Issues Consultation

Feedback from the Issues consultation came from a variety of organisations, local groups and individuals. Responses were varied with a broad range of topics covered including community / indoor sports, digital infrastructure, transport and retail.

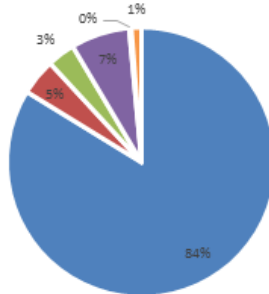
Experience of neighbourhood and travel

The County Council identified the Plan should include reference to the following: 15/20 minute neighbourhoods, reducing air pollution, consider integration at the edge of the city and prioritise sustainable travel. LP allocations and policies should seek that new development and redevelopment be located along key public transport and active travel corridors and around prominent multimodal interchanges. Revision of OTS must be taken into account (now to be Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP)). Individuals provided feedback on the following key issues: congestion/pollution issues, Local Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), safer & more walking cycling routes, easy of movement for people with reduced mobility, improve public transport and reducing reliance on the private car.

People were asked how they generally travel to a range of facilities. A majority of people walked or cycled to all facilities (if those who don't access those facilities were excluded). The facility with greatest proportion of people walking and cycling was parks/green spaces, to which 84% of people usually walked or cycled. 52% of people walked or cycled to cultural and entertainment venues, which was the lowest proportion for any type of facility if excluding those who don't access the types of facility. This had the highest proportion who used the bus (23%). Cultural and entertainment facilities are not generally accessed daily and having them in easy walking and cycling distance is not as important as for workplaces, convenience shops and parks. They are clearly located in places considered easily accessible by bus for many, which is important. The facility accessed by highest proportion of people driving was basic high street shopping, which 20% drove to.

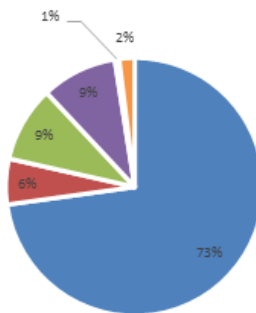
Parks and open spaces for leisure sport or recreation

- I do walk and/or cycle to...
- I usually catch the bus to...
- I usually access online...
- I would like to walk and/or cycle to... but don't often
- I usually drive to...
- Not applicable



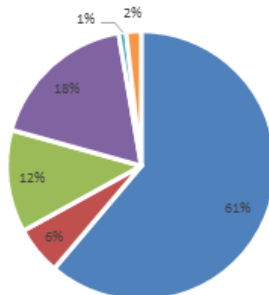
Pubs, cafes and restuarants

- I do walk and/or cycle to...
- I would like to walk and/or cycle to... but don't often
- I usually catch the bus to...
- I usually drive to...
- I usually access online...
- Not applicable



Healthcare facilities

- I do walk and/or cycle to...
- I usually catch the bus to...
- I usually access online...
- I would like to walk and/or cycle to... but don't often
- I usually drive to...
- Not applicable



Community/ indoor sports

Identified a need for investment in community centres. Inequality within the centre was highlighted as well as a particular need in East Oxford. Some said indoor venues are key, especially with potential severe weather conditions, and others said outdoor (but undercover) facilities are key due to pandemic resilience. Also, a need to produce high quality civic space for all to use. Must also think about disabled access and access in general.

Digital infrastructure

The importance of digital access including broadband and 3G, for all, including the elderly, was identified. The County Council identified it is important to raise the issue of changing technology and the need for neighbourhoods to innovate and be adaptable. Respondents also referred to making people aware of the carbon footprint that online communication and storage holds. Other suggestions included the Council should encourage innovative engineering which supports climate change. Could CIL play a part in this? The use of electric charging points and electric cars should be encouraged. The Green Party indicated the concept of 15-minute city is crucial and the Cowley Area Transport Group suggested that ensuring small urban communities within Oxford have good and accessible facilities for all should be a universal goal for private, public and third sector bodies to cut the need for journeys.

Retail

Issues raised included the following:

- Shopping in Oxford has become too commercialised. With the global pandemic and environmental emergencies we need shopping to be more climate conscious and support more local businesses.
- Make better arrangements for supermarket deliveries to people forced to self-isolate.
- Keeping East Oxford well-supplied with both chain and independent food shops – on the Cowley Road, it was Euro Supermarket that kept us going when the supermarkets ran out.
- Also need to retain vibrancy of the city centre – very important.

2.2 Updates to national/ local policy since 2021 Issues Consultation

Transport

- In July 2021 the Department for Transport (DfT) published 'Decarbonising transport: a better, greener Britain'. The paper sets out the government's commitments and the actions needed to decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK and includes details of the pathway to achieving net zero transport in the UK, the wider benefits net zero transport can deliver and the principles that underpin the government's approach to delivering net zero transport.
- In July 2022, the DfT published a further report 'Decarbonising transport: one year on' which reviews the effectiveness of the previously published paper. This report summarises what has been achieved to reduce emissions and the next steps the government will take to support decarbonisation of the transport sector.

Retail

The significant changes to the Use Class Order were discussed in the background paper to support the Issues consultation. In addition to those changes, as of the 1st August it has been possible to apply for prior approval to changes from Use Class E to residential use. That means that, in principle and assuming some technical information is provided, shops, offices, gyms and other commercial uses that fall under Use Class E can be changed to residential use (assuming the building can be converted).

3. How are current Local Plan 2036 policies performing?

3.1 Analysis from 2020/21 Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)

Data is not included relating to digital infrastructure or transport (as it is a County Council function). However, data collected shows that a range of change of use applications were approved to allow a variety of new community facilities:

AMR 2020-21 – Table 18 Community Facilities permissions in monitoring period:

Type	Application reference	Location	Development summary
Community Centre	20/00319/FUL	1-5 Buckingham Street Oxford Oxfordshire	Change of use of former Conservative Club (sui generis) on the ground floor and Offices on the first floor (use class B1a) to a mixed use Community Hall (Use Class D1) and Offices (Use Class B1a). Alteration to front door and erection of canopy (amended description).
Primary Healthcare	20/00502/FUL	122 The Westgate Queen Street Oxford Oxfordshire OX1 1PB	Change of use from shop (Use Class A1) to mixed use shop (Use Class A1) and health centre (Use class D1)
Community Centre	20/01379/FUL	Florence Park Children's Centre Florence Park Rymers Lane Oxford Oxfordshire OX4 3JZ	Application for permanent use of the Cafe (Use Class A3) and shared community space (Use Class D1).
Primary Healthcare	20/01468/FUL	13-21 Cornmarket Street Oxford OX1 3HE	Change of use of basement, part ground and part first floor from retail (Use Class A1) to a GP Surgery (Use Class D1).
Community Centre	20/01898/FUL	The Irving Building Hertford Street Oxford Oxfordshire OX4 3AJ	Change of use to a mixed business (Use Class B1) and non-residential institutions (Use Class D1). Erection of a single storey side and rear extension to create a community building (Use Class D1). Erection of to 9no. buildings to create 3 x 3 bed 6 x 2 bed apartments (Use Class C3).
Primary Healthcare	20/02399/FUL	116 Abingdon Road Oxford OX1 4PZ	Partial change of use to ground floor from dwelling house (Use Class C3) to an Osteopathy Health Clinic (Sui Generis).

Primary Healthcare	20/02677/FUL	47 Gaisford Road Oxford OX4 3LH	Change of use of a House in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4) to a mother and baby unit (Use Class C2).
Community Centre	20/03089/CPU	St Andrews Bookshop 57C St Clement's Street Oxford Oxfordshire OX4 1AG	Application to certify that the change of use from retail to day-centre (Use Class E) is lawful development.

The recent changes to the Use Classes Order limit the effectiveness of how retail frontage policies can be monitored. For the 2020/21 AMR, monitoring was reported based upon the previous Use Class Order, whilst these are now out of date, these were the basis for decisions until September 2020.

Policy V2 sets out to manage shopping frontages within the city. The policy sets out certain criteria for which planning permission will be granted for particular uses. Before the change in the Use Classes Order this included A1, A2 – 5 and other use classes that would not reduce A1 use classes in city centre areas. The A1 use class (the majority of which is shops) dominates central areas with over 60% in both the primary central area and the Westgate Shopping Centre. Policy V2 in the Local Plan aims to keep A1 use classes at over 60% in primary and Westgate frontages and at 40% in secondary areas.

Outside of the city centre area, Oxford’s district and local shopping centre frontages were also monitored, showing A1 retail provision targets were met across all the district centres where data was collected during the 2020/21 monitoring period. The remainder of the A classes make up a considerable percentage of provision. Notably, A2 use classes are well over 15% in Headington and Summertown, while A3 use classes are well over 20% in East Oxford.

3.2 Summary of key feedback from DM and Specialist discussions

Development of policy options was informed by discussions with members of the development management team, who have experience of applying the existing policies, as well as various infrastructure providers including the County Council.

Education

The County Council updated us to say that additional SEND provision is needed in the County and a new SEND school is likely to be provided in the south of the County in 2024/25. This will reduce the demand on existing SEND schools and hopefully prevent needless travel across the city.

The Pupil Place Plan 2021/22 – 25/26 provides information on school number provisions. It separates the city into areas and looks at primary school and secondary school. It is noted that, should developments occur on the outskirts of the city, this could mean that a new school may be needed in certain areas. Should be noted that this plan is quite limited time wise.

Digital Infrastructure

Initial impressions from the Digital Infrastructure Partnership (County) was that overall the present policy seemed to cover most of the key aspects to inform new policy options. DM also noted that

the current policy is in-line with the NPPF and they have no issues with it. Key consideration will be whether it is needed

Community facilities (includes indoor sports, community centres, museums and cultural attractions)

The City Council's Community Services team advised that the Covid pandemic identified a greater trend for the use of outdoor facilities- example given was the long waiting lists for allotments.

Community centres are key to providing affordable, accessible and diverse spaces locally. There has been a push towards a requirement for modern and flexible spaces – need to make our centres more sustainable (link with decarbonisation programme). Tough decisions needed on future operating models. Need to make facilities work and be flexible for different needs – need to integrate communities and reduce inequalities. Work currently underway to review the future of leisure facilities in the city – trying to look at these innovatively, e.g. integrating leisure with other facilities, for example health. Also need to ensure leisure centres are able to remain viable.

Some discussion about shared use agreements. Although some success with higher education establishments and some independent schools, clubs have often had more success than the city council in securing agreements.

Libraries

County confirmed that the information provided in the IDP relating to library provision in Oxford City is still accurate. County have recently consulted on the draft Library and Heritage Strategy (May 2022).

Transport

The County Council outlined emerging themes from Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP) and Active Travel Strategy. Formal consultation on the COTP document took place July – September. Current timescales are that COTP will be taken to County Cabinet in Dec 22.

DM reported that they had some problems with the application of the current Policy M3 and that clarity was needed about what a supermarket is, so the policy and Technical Advice Note are consistent, and that maps showing walking distances would be helpful. Maps had been deliberately avoided because shops and bus routes can change so it needs to be considered each time. Policy needs to ensure e-bikes, cargo bikes, etc are considered. Also a need to consider potential negatives of electric charging if they interrupt pavements or cycle lanes.

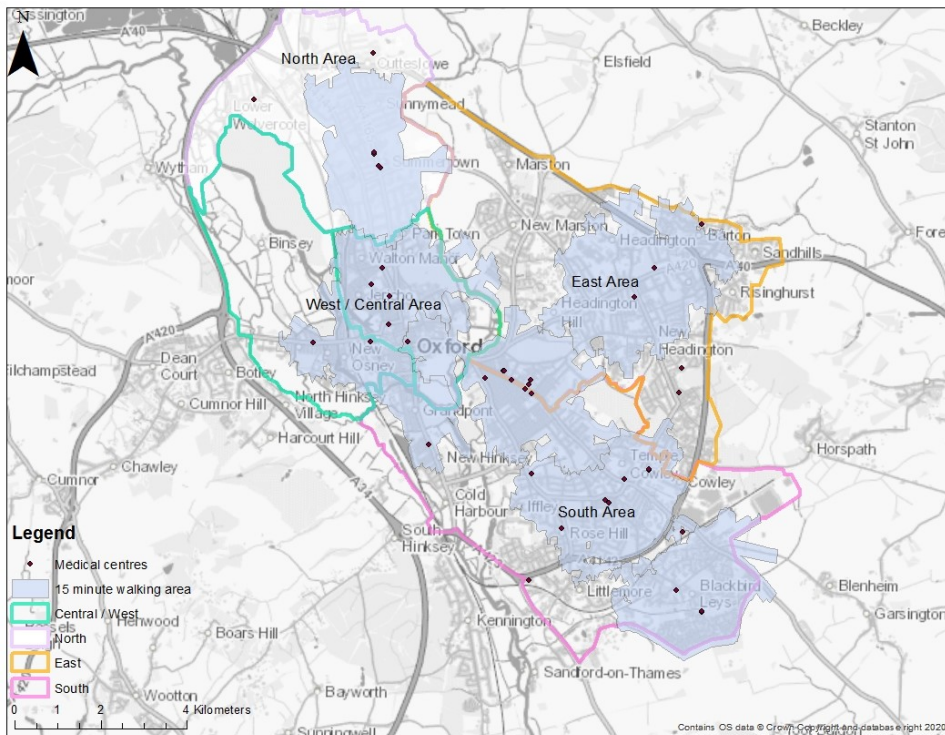
4. What does all this mean?

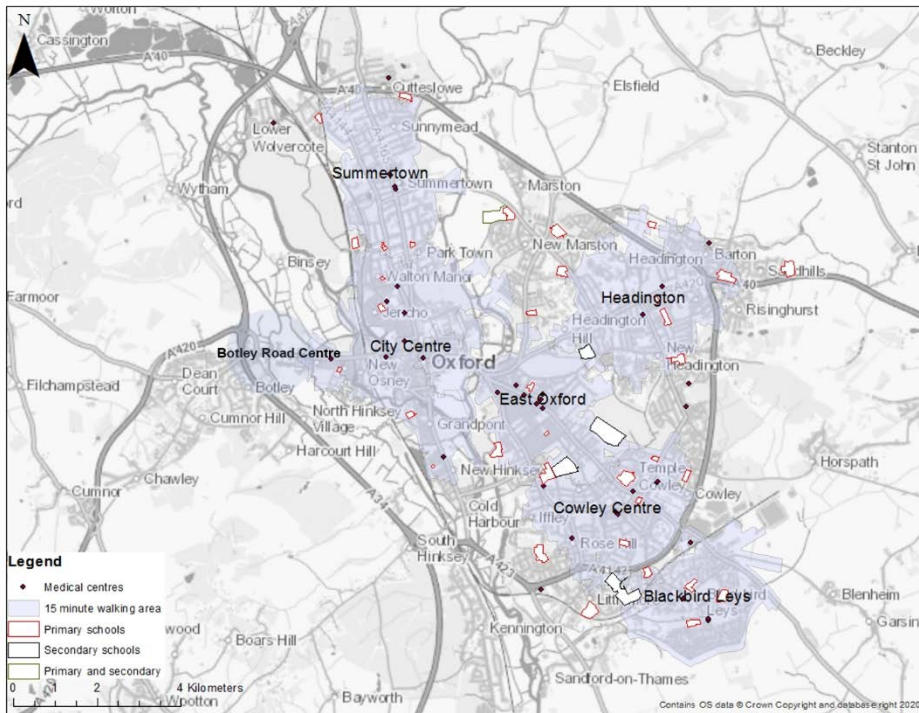
It is clear how highly valued our local neighbourhoods and having facilities and services nearby and easily accessed by foot and bike. This is good for health and wellbeing, allowing active travel, access to facilities and services needed for everyday living, and fostering a sense of community. It is also good for the environment, reducing the need to travel by car.

In order to achieve the aims it is important to think about what services need protecting and encouraging. A key part of the strategy is to focus uses that attract lots of people at existing centres,

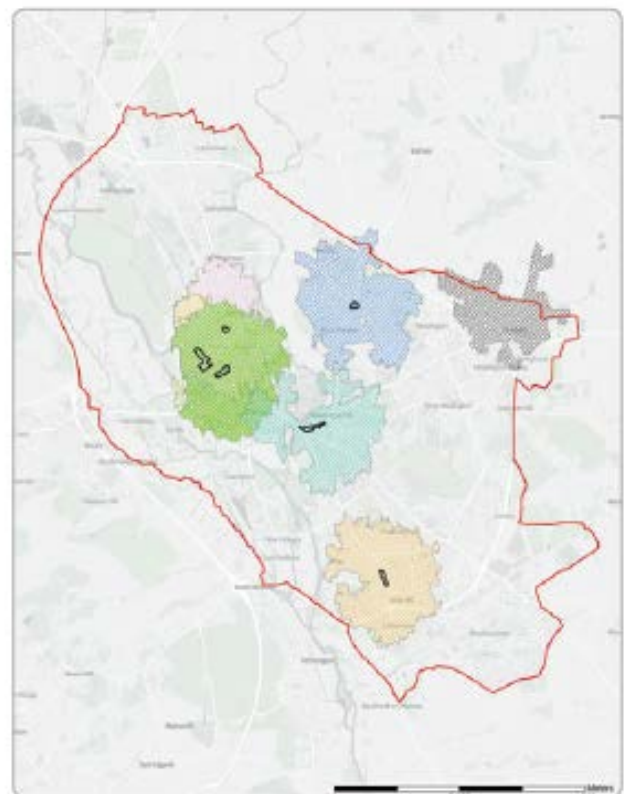
and this is reflected in the policy options. Policy approaches are also aimed at protecting the vitality of these centres. These areas are well connected and spread around the city, allowing good access to a wide range of facilities for most of Oxford. Retail can no longer be protected as it is not a Use Class in its own right. Instead, the policy option approaches focus on commercial uses generally still representing a high proportion of the ground floor use of centres, creating activity and ensuring a concentration of facilities people want to visit remain together, in transport hubs.

Mapping shows that the majority of the city is within 15 minutes walking distance of a district centre or a local centre. The maps below show that there is also good coverage of secondary schools and primary schools.





If local centres are added, including a newly proposed local centre at Underhill Circus, this results in nearly the whole city being within 15 minutes walking distance. Proposed policy approaches are to protect these centres.



15-minute walking distances from city and district centres (left) and local centres (right)

