



*History of joint
working in
Oxfordshire*

**Oxford Local Plan
2040**

**BACKGROUND
PAPER 16**

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BGP.16 - History of joint working in Oxfordshire

1. Introduction

1.1 Local Authorities in Oxfordshire have a long history of working together to address cross-boundary issues. There are a series of regular meetings and forums through which frequent contact and discussion takes place. These include the Oxfordshire Planning Policy Managers (OPPO) meetings, this grouping provides a regular forum for authorities to provide updates on plan progress and to discuss cross boundary issues. The frequency of these meetings has varied as the work programme has dictated from quarterly to as often as weekly during the work on the OGNA and has settled in 2023/24 as monthly. The Heads of Planning (HoP) from each authority similarly meet regularly, albeit as required by their work programme. During the Oxfordshire Plan project this was every month, but more recently this has been as and when necessary. Planning Portfolio Holders formerly met every month as the Growth Board (and then FOP) Oxfordshire Plan Member Advisory Sub-Group, and now meeting every other month in an updated form as the FOP Planning Advisory Group. Outside of Planning forums, Chief Executives meet regularly as do Council Leaders.

1.2 This paper provides an outline of the mechanisms and governance arrangements for joint working across the constituent authorities of Oxfordshire with particular focus on discussions around, and joint working on, planning. This is set out broadly chronologically and provides a record of the evolution of these relationships. Background Paper 17 (BGP.17: History of the development of housing needs evidence in Oxfordshire) provides more specific details on joint working around the issue of building an evidence base on housing needs.

2. Pre-2014: SHMA 2014 and adopted Local Plans to 2030/36

2.1 In April 2014 the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment was published. This was the culmination of a joint project commissioned in June 2013 by West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Cherwell District Council. A consultancy team of GL Hearn, Justin Gardner Consulting and SQW produced the SHMA under the oversight of the Oxfordshire Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (which became the Oxfordshire Growth Board in 2014, and then the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in 2021).

2.2 The SHMA identified the Objectively Assessed Housing Need over the period to 2031 following the relevant government guidance at the time. The SHMA identified housing need for Oxfordshire (2011-2031) to be 100,060 homes. The SHMA was the primary evidence on housing need informing that round of Local Plans across Oxfordshire. Over the following years, all those Local Plans were examined and the evidence and policies on housing need was found to be sound:

- Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part One – adopted December 2016
- West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 – adopted September 2018
- Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part Two – adopted October 2019
- Oxford Local Plan 2036 – adopted June 2020 (Based on SHMA and SHMA roll-forward)
- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) Partial Review – Oxford’s Unmet Housing Need – adopted September 2020
- South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 – adopted December 2020

3. 2014-2018: Post-SHMA joint working and the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

3.1 Following the production of the SHMA a programme of joint work was agreed to take housing matters forward as Oxfordshire partners. In November 2014 an Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting agreed this programme, based on key principles that would underpin future post SHMA work, together with the scope and timetabling of that work, to enabling all authorities to work together in a collective and collaborative way.

3.2 An important first workstream of the post-SHMA work programme was to clarify the extent to which Oxford's housing need could be accommodated in Oxford City itself. There were several elements and sequential stages to this workstream involving:

- Oxford Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (a study of the available housing capacity of Oxford by the City Council, 2014)
- Cundall Report (a critique of the City Council's SHLAA commissioned by South, Vale and Cherwell, Nov 2014)
- Oxford City response to the Cundall Report (May 2015)
- Fortismere review of Oxford's capacity (consultants appointed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board to act as a critical friend on its post-SHMA work programme and to review the previous pieces of work)

3.3 Other elements of the post-SHMA work programme included the following joint pieces of work:

- LUC Green Belt Study (commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council on behalf of the six Oxfordshire Local Authorities, Oct 2015)
- LUC Assessment of Strategic Options (June 2016)

3.4 By November 2015, a working assumption of 15,000 homes for the period 2011-2031 was agreed as Oxford's unmet need, this was discussed at the Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting on 19th November 2015. On 26 September 2016 the Oxfordshire Growth Board decided on an apportionment of 14,850 for consideration in the preparation of Oxfordshire authorities Local Plans. This apportionment was followed by a signed Memorandum of Co-operation in November 2016. The Memorandum of Co-operation was signed by all other Oxfordshire authorities with the exception of South Oxfordshire District Council. Although not signed by South Oxfordshire District Council, South's officers played an active part in the Growth Board work programme, contributed to the preparation of all evidence documents and the figure in the Memorandum was reflected in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034. Full details are provided in BGP.17.

3.5 Joint work continued through 2017 including:

- publication of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (a shared economic strategy for all Oxfordshire authorities led by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, 2017),
- in the partnership's response to the National Infrastructure Commission's work on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridor (which highlighted the potential to grow the high-value, knowledge-based economy so that it competes on a global stage and boosts UK plc)
- publication of the first OxIS: Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (Nov 2017), and
- publication of, and agreement with the government of, the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy (Nov 2017).

3.6 In Autumn of 2017 the group of Oxfordshire's Leaders and subsequently the Oxfordshire Growth Board (30.10.2017) discussed and recommended work on a joint spatial plan (known then as the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan or JSSP, and later as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050). The concept of a

joint spatial plan was later taken forward as a key element of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal with government.

3.7 In the budget statement of November 2017, the Government announced a Housing and Growth Deal for Oxfordshire. This secured £215 million of government investment over 5 years for new homes and infrastructure in Oxfordshire. The Growth Deal was signed by Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

3.8 Through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, the Oxfordshire authorities committed to:

- The submission and adoption, subject to the inspection process, of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (the Oxfordshire Plan) covering all five district councils in Oxfordshire by 2021; and
- Plan for and support the delivery of 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031 – backed up with a credible plan for delivery, outlining interim milestones and targets as agreed with Homes England and Government.

3.9 Through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, the Government committed to:

- Provide Oxfordshire with up to £215 million funding for investment in new homes and infrastructure; and
- Explore options to grant Oxfordshire certain time-limited planning flexibilities, subject to consultation where appropriate.

3.10 The government funding was made up as follows: £60m for affordable housing, £150m for infrastructure (£30m over five years), and: £5m capacity funding for JSSP and housing delivery.

3.11 Additional governance structures were developed within Oxfordshire to help manage this programme and agreed at the Growth Board meeting of February 2018. Four main workstreams were established: productivity, affordable housing, housing from infrastructure and joint spatial planning. Oversight of the delivery of the Deal sat with the Growth Board, which was responsible for agreeing delivery programmes for each of the Deal strands with progress reported to the Growth Board on a quarterly basis. The Growth Board also had a number of sub-groups to look at the workstream strands in more detail. Below the Growth Board, an officer structure was established to deliver the Deal. A Growth Board Executive Officer Group (EOG), Officer Programme Board, and Chief Executives Group were established to report through to the Growth Board. It was agreed early on that with regards to planning decisions, authority remained with each Local Planning Authority with decisions on the Joint Plan to be taken by each LPA individually.

4. 2018-2022: Oxfordshire Plan 2050

4.1 Work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 began in 2018. A new team was established to develop the Oxfordshire Plan, this team made up of a mix of secondees from the partner authorities and new members of staff hosted by the County Council. An Oxfordshire Plan governance structure was also established with a Liaison Group (made up of a planning officer representative from each of the partner and observing bodies: County Council and LEP – meeting once every two weeks) and a Heads of Planning group (the Head of Planning of each LPA and equivalent of observing bodies – meeting monthly). These project-specific arrangements supplemented the Senior Officer Programme Board, EOG and the Oxfordshire Plan Member Advisory Sub-Group (consisting of Cabinet Members for Planning) feeding into the Growth Board.

4.2 As work commenced a series of project management documents were developed and agreed:

- Scoping Document (setting out the geographical extent, policy extent, plan period, timetable, evidence base, governance and links to other projects)
- Local Development Scheme for delivery of the Oxfordshire Plan
- Statement of Community Involvement for delivery of the Oxfordshire Plan

4.3 All these project management documents were discussed by the Growth Board (31.7.18) and approved by each LPA's Cabinet/Executive in September 2018. The SCI was subject to public consultation between November 2018 and January 2019.

4.4 A Regulation 18 Part 1 document for the Oxfordshire Plan was published in February 2019 (see BGP.17 for more details). This was the culmination of work between the Oxfordshire Plan team and each of the partner authorities including Members and Officers. Cabinet/Executive approval of each LPA of the draft Regulation 18 Part 1 document was secured in January 2019 (including a Scrutiny Committee discussion at each LPA). Public consultation then was held on the Oxfordshire Plan Regulation 18 Part 1 document in February and March 2019; during this period the Growth Board also considered the document. A 'Call for Ideas' consultation also took place in March/April 2019, which generated suggestions for additional strategic development locations in Oxfordshire.

4.5 2019/20 was a busy period for planning in Oxfordshire with the adoption of four Local Plans and the development of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. The Strategic Vision was a linked Oxfordshire Growth Board project that sought to establish an agreed set of principles across the Oxfordshire Partners, some of which would influence the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, others of which went beyond planning and would align with other workstreams of the Growth Board. The Strategic Vision went through its own approvals process with a draft going before each authority's Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet/Executive in December 2020 and public consultation through a new website "Oxfordshire Open Thought"; before returning to each authority's Cabinet/Executive in April 2021 for agreement. The Strategic Vision established a definition of "good growth" and a set of 10 guiding principles (see Appendix 1).

4.6 In February 2021 the government published "An Introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework". The Arc concept further developed the National Infrastructure Commission's work on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridor. The Arc was a national economic priority comprising the five ceremonial counties of Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. Separate governance arrangements and project plans had been established for the Arc geography and all the authorities of Oxfordshire were fully involved in the project.

4.7 In July 2021 the Oxfordshire Plan draft Regulation 18 Part 2 document went to each LPA's Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet/Executive for consideration and approval for public consultation. The period of consultation ran from 30.7.21 until 8.10.21 (see BGP.17 for more details). The common committee report stated:

"Oxfordshire's City and District Councils are working together to produce the Oxfordshire Plan under Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as a means of co-operating to effectively address strategic planning matters in Oxfordshire...The Oxfordshire Plan is being developed by consensus, with officers and elected members from all the Oxfordshire authorities and OxLEP working together at every stage of plan-making process to ensure that individual and collective views are taken into account. A number of mechanisms for co-operation and joint working

between elected members and officers (at all levels) have been established to support the delivery of the Oxfordshire Plan.”

4.8 A summary Consultation Statement of the Regulation 18 Part2 consultation responses was produced. The Statement itself went to each authority’s Scrutiny Committee in February 2022 and onto their Cabinet/Executives in March 2022 (see BGP.17 for more details).

4.9 Through the Spring and Summer of 2022 work continued on the Oxfordshire Plan with the aim of consulting on a Regulation 18 Part 3 document. A series of Member workshops were held to discuss the evidence base and next steps. However, by the first week of August the working relationship had broken down and the partnership arrangements to deliver the Oxfordshire Plan had come to an end. A joint statement was released by the leaders of South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council:

“The five Local Planning authorities in Oxfordshire have been working together on a joint plan for Oxfordshire to 2050. It is with regret that we were unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan.

“Local Plans for the City and Districts will now provide the framework for the long term planning of Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end and we will now transition to a process focused on Local Plans. The issues of housing needs will now be addressed through individual Local Plans for each of the City and Districts. The Councils will cooperate with each other and with other key bodies as they prepare their Local Plans.”

5. Autumn 2022-present: Post-Oxfordshire Plan

5.1 With the fall of the Oxfordshire Plan, the arrangements for joint working on planning matters changed. On 27.9.22 a meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership agreed a new working relationship between the Oxfordshire authorities on planning:

“The work towards the Oxfordshire Plan was only one part of a long-standing and continued collaboration between the local authorities in Oxfordshire. The valuable insights gained in the progress of drawing up the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and the results of its public consultations will be carried into the next phase of delivering their shared goal of shaping a healthy, happy future for the county and ensuring Oxfordshire is at the forefront of tackling the most pressing problems facing humanity.

“All six councils have formally adopted a shared Strategic Vision for the county, which sets out ambitious goals for sustainable travel, affordable housing, and a healthy natural environment, accessible to all. Each council is working to deliver this vision. Following Wednesday’s meeting, the councils have also agreed that continued collaborative working on spatial planning matters will be valuable.

“A new Terms of Reference is being drawn up to ensure that a members’ advisory group with planning policy portfolio holders from each authority can continue to discuss spatial planning and issues that impact the County as a whole. The Advisory Group will continue to update the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to ensure a full picture of progress on District and City councils’ Local Plans and other relevant plans like the county’s Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.”

5.2 As the formal FOP governance arrangements around planning changed, the focus of joint working (at an officer level) reverted back to the existing arrangements of OPPO and to a lesser extent Heads of Planning and Chief Executives’ regular briefings. OPPO had been meeting more

regularly in the latter days of the Oxfordshire Plan project as an additional resource to the project. After the fall of the Oxfordshire Plan, OPPO continued to meet frequently both as the primary means of keeping each other informed, but also in a more practical sense, co-ordinating joint work and discussing strategic matters. Heads of Planning who had been meeting monthly through the Oxfordshire Plan project currently meet less frequently but still regularly. Those meetings, and in addition, the regular Chief Executives meetings are the agreed escalation mechanisms when there are issues that OPPO alone cannot resolve.

Appendix 1: Summary of Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

THE VISION

The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision sets out a highly ambitious pathway for long-term change towards a more sustainable future. Prepared by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership,¹ the Vision is designed to be overarching and cross-cutting to inform a range of local and national plans, strategies and programmes. Enhanced wellbeing sits at the heart of our ambition. We want Oxfordshire's people, places and environment to thrive so that the lives of current and future generations are enhanced. To achieve this will require bold, collaborative and inclusive thinking, with decisions and actions that deliver real and lasting change in ways that build resilience and enhance our shared prospects for the future.

OUTCOMES

These are the outcomes we want to have achieved by 2050:

- Our natural environment will be in a better state than that in which we found it
- We will already be carbon neutral and accelerating towards a **carbon negative future**
- Our residents will be **healthier and happier**, and overall wellbeing will have improved
- Our local economy will be **globally competitive**, sustainable, diverse and inclusive
- Our county will be a more **equal, fair and inclusive** place for everyone
- Our **vibrant historic and cultural offer** will be rich, diverse and enhanced
- We will have energy **efficient and affordable homes** in the right number, location and tenure
- Our county's **connectivity** will be transformed in ways that enhance wellbeing
- Our diverse and vibrant communities will thrive with a strong **sense of identity**

ACHIEVING GOOD GROWTH

National policies require Oxfordshire to plan positively for growth in ways that achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability. We have defined what good growth means for Oxfordshire to ensure it is compatible with our guiding principles and strategic outcomes. Good growth will:

- Enhance the historic and natural environment
- Support a diverse high-value economy
- Be high-quality and resilient to change
- Embrace innovation and technology
- Be sustainable, clean and green
- Be healthy and inclusive

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Taken together with our Outcomes and definition of good growth, our Guiding Principles form our overarching approach to long-term sustainable development in Oxfordshire. We will:

- Reverse the impacts of climate change
- Improve wellbeing and reduce inequalities
- Enhance our natural environment
- Reflect our diverse communities and places
- Deliver homes that meet our needs
- Embrace technological changes
- Support a prosperous and inclusive economy
- Expect high-quality development
- Help people to help each other
- Maximise the benefits of strong collaboration

¹The Strategic Vision has been prepared by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, which comprises the six councils of Oxfordshire and key strategic partners.

Appendix 2: Local election results in Oxfordshire over the period

The results of local elections in Oxfordshire over the period covered by this paper:

May 2013:

- County – NOC (Conservative minority) from Conservative

May 2014:

- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- WODC – Conservative hold
- Oxford – Labour hold

May 2015:

- WODC – Conservative hold
- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- Vale – Conservative hold
- SODC – Conservative hold

May 2016:

- Oxford – Labour hold
- WODC – Conservative hold

May 2017

- County – NOC (Conservative/Independent) from NOC (Conservative minority)

May 2018

- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- WODC – Conservative hold
- City – Labour hold

May 2019:

- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- WODC – Conservative hold
- SODC – NOC (Lib Dem/Green alliance) from Conservative
- Vale – Lib Dem from Conservative

May 2021:

- County Council – NOC (Lib Dem/Labour/Green) from NOC (Conservative/Independent)
- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- WODC – Conservative hold
- City – Labour hold

May 2022:

- WODC – NOC (Lib Dem/Labour/Green alliance) from Conservative
- Cherwell – Conservative hold
- City – Labour hold

May 2023:

- Cherwell – NOC (Conservative minority) from Conservative
- WODC – NOC (Lib Dem/Labour/Green alliance) from NOC (Lib Dem/Labour/Green)
- SODC – Lib Dem from NOC (Lib Dem/Green alliance)
- Vale – Lib Dem hold