



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 12 MARCH 2025
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2041 – PREFERRED OPTIONS CONSULTATION
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager Email: andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager Email: andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To provide an update on the emerging draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 including the Regulation 18 ‘preferred options’ public consultation which is scheduled to begin in May 2025.
Annex	None
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of the report including the implications of the updated NPPF published in December 2024 and the intention to defer consideration of the Local Plan preferred option consultation paper until May 2025.2. Agree that a minor addendum to the Council’s published Local Development Scheme (LDS) – November 2024 be published to reflect the fact that the Local Plan 2041 preferred options consultation paper will now be considered by the Council’s Executive in May 2025 with public consultation to begin in late May 2025.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 is currently at the Regulation 18 'plan preparation' stage, with two major public consultations having been carried out previously and supplemented with further, focused engagement with key stakeholders.</p> <p>A further 'preferred options' public consultation will take place in May 2025, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to comment and respond to the emerging structure and content of the new Local Plan.</p> <p>Beyond that, the intention is to publish the Regulation 19 pre-submission draft Local Plan which will be the subject of a minimum six weeks' public consultation in line with legislative requirements before being submitted for independent examination.</p> <p>Public consultation at both the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages will take place in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Members will be aware that the District Council is seeking to produce a new Local Plan covering the period up to 2041. Once adopted, it will replace the current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 which was approved in September 2018.
- 1.2** The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the policy approach being taken in the emerging draft plan, in particular, the preferred options consultation paper which is intended to be published for public consultation in May 2025.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The emerging draft Local Plan 2041 is currently at the Regulation 18 'plan preparation' stage with two main phases of public consultation having taken place.
- 2.2** Both consultations were very successful, with strong support expressed for many of the initial ideas put forward around infrastructure, flood risk, climate change, nature recovery and health and well-being.
- 2.3** Taking account of the feedback received, national policy and emerging technical evidence and analysis, the next stage of public consultation is intended to be a 'preferred options' consultation beginning in May 2025.
- 2.4** The structure of the consultation document has been agreed and the content is currently being drafted.
- 2.5** The working draft is based on the following main sections:
 1. Introduction
 2. Background Context
 3. Challenges and Opportunities
 4. Draft Vision and Objectives
 5. Core Policies
 6. Place-Based Policies
 7. Development Management Policies
 8. Implementation and Monitoring
- 2.6** The draft vision will outline how West Oxfordshire is expected to evolve under the new local plan in the period up to 2041 whilst the objectives will articulate the vision and help to guide the overall content of the plan.
- 2.7** In terms of proposed policy content, the 'Core Policies' will apply on a District-wide basis and address issues of strategic significance including the amount of growth to be planned for and where that will be focused (the spatial strategy).
- 2.8** The 'Place-Based Policies' will apply to specific geographical areas such as the Cotswolds National Landscape and Oxford Green Belt as well as specific settlements, including any proposed draft site allocations.

2.9 The 'Development Management' policies will comprise a series of day-to-day policies which will help guide decisions on planning applications including for example, policies relating to housing mix, biodiversity net gain and heritage assets.

3. KEY AREAS OF FOCUS FOR THE NEW LOCAL PLAN

3.1 In terms of national policy, because the emerging draft Local Plan is at a relatively early Regulation 18 'plan preparation' stage, Officers have the opportunity to fully align it with the updated NPPF published in December 2024.

3.2 This includes the new standard method for assessing local housing need as well as the increased emphasis placed on social rented housing, education, health and supporting the transition to net zero carbon by 2050.

3.3 Building on this updated national policy position and the feedback received to the two previous stages of consultation, the emerging draft local plan has a number of marked differences from the current Local Plan 2031 adopted in 2018.

3.4 In particular, the new plan will have a much stronger emphasis on the following:

- Mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, including a requirement for net zero carbon development and support for retro-fitting;
- Tackling the ecological emergency by helping nature to recover, in support of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS);
- Timely investment in infrastructure, including a requirement for site-specific Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDPs) in all major schemes;
- Health and well-being, including the adoption of healthy place shaping principles in support of the Oxfordshire healthy place-shaping agenda;
- Adopting an integrated approach to the water environment such that different aspects including flood risk, sustainable drainage, water supply and disposal and the provision of blue infrastructure are treated holistically
- Accelerating housing delivery including the provision of new social rented homes;
- Increased support for community-led and self-build housing;
- Reducing reliance on the private car and promoting much greater levels of walking, and cycling;
- Increasing the use of public transport including policy support for the potential provision of a new rail line from Carterton to Oxford via Witney and Eynsham; and
- Settlement specific strategies to replace the current sub-area approach of the adopted plan.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1** The Council's currently published timetable for the new Local Plan (LDS) indicates that the preferred options consultation paper will be considered by the Council's Executive in March 2025 and then subject to a 6-week public consultation beginning in early May 2025.
- 4.2** However, it has not been possible to finalise the preferred options paper within this timeframe for a number of reasons, not least the publication of the updated NPPF in December 2024 and the 'knock-on' effects this has had in terms of policy drafting and the Council's supporting evidence base (e.g. housing and economic needs).
- 4.3** As such, an Executive meeting has been arranged for 14 May 2025 and subject to Member approval, the preferred options consultation will then begin in late May 2025.
- 4.4** To reflect this slight change of dates, a minor addendum to the LDS is proposed which, subject to the approval of Members, will be published online and made available at a number of locations across the District.
- 4.5** In the interim, Officers will continue to draft the Regulation 18 preferred options consultation paper and oversee the preparation of relevant supporting evidence including the assessment of suitable development site options.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1** The District Council could choose not to progress with an update of the Local Plan. However, local authorities are required to keep plans up to date, typically reviewing them every 5-years or so.
- 5.2** The Regulation 10A review of the current Local Plan carried out in September 2023 highlighted a number of policies which require updating, including those relating to housing provision.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The preparation and adoption of a new Local Plan has significant financial implications with provision for this having been made through the District Council's budget setting process.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The report raises no direct legal implications. The Local Plan must be prepared in accordance with legislative requirements and when considered at examination, the appointed Planning Inspector will determine whether or not the District Council has fulfilled those requirements.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1** The report presents no significant risks.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1** An Equality and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) of the Local Plan will accompany the next stage of public consultation in May 2025.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** The climate and ecological emergencies form a central component of the emerging preferred options consultation paper.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** None.