



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 11 JUNE 2025
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2041 – PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS CONSULTATION
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To consider the Local Plan 2041 Preferred Policy Options Consultation Paper which is proposed to be published for consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
Annexes	Annex A – Local Plan 2041 Preferred Policy Options (May 2025) Annex B – Summary Overview of Draft Development Management Policies
Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Executive resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of the report;2. Agree that the Local Plan Preferred Policy Options paper attached at Annex A be published for the purposes of public consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012;3. Authorise the Planning Policy Manager to make any necessary minor amendments to the preferred policy options paper in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Head of Planning, prior to consultation taking place.

Corporate priorities	<p>The preparation of a new Local Plan for West Oxfordshire will help to support all of the Council's corporate priorities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All • Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>The emerging draft Local Plan 2041 has been the subject of extensive public consultation to date, with further consultation now proposed in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.</p> <p>The proposed consultation will take the form of 'preferred policy options', setting out the Council's proposed approach to the new Local Plan in terms of overall structure and content.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Members will be aware that the District Council is producing 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 consider the draft Local Plan preferred policy options consultation paper attached at Annex A. This sets out the Council's proposed approach to the new Local Plan in terms of its overall structure and content.

2. LOCAL PLAN 2041 – PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1** Work on the new Local Plan 2041 has been ongoing for some time now, with major public consultations having taken place in 2022 and 2023. Progress since then has been delayed by various factors, not least the new NPPF published in December 2024 which introduced several important changes to national policy, including the Government's standard method for assessing housing need.
- 2.2** Taking this and other factors into account, Officers have prepared a draft 'preferred policy options' consultation paper (Annex A) the purpose of which is to articulate the Council's emerging thinking on the shape, direction and content of the new Local Plan.
- 2.3** It is not a full draft plan but is intended to include sufficient detail such that the overall 'direction of travel' is clear and local communities and key stakeholders can make their views known.
- 2.4** Further work is continuing on the assessment of several hundred potential development sites, many of which were put forward in response to the previous two public consultations. This is being undertaken in the context of the preferred policy options paper and a set of preferred development areas will be brought before Members later in the summer and consulted on thereafter.

3. DRAFT PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS CONSULTATION PAPER

- 3.1** The current draft preferred policy options paper is attached at Annex A. The consultation will invite views on a number of issues including the overall structure, style and format of the plan, the draft vision and objectives and a series of initial draft policies.
- 3.2** A summary overview is provided below with particular reference made to any notable differences between the current and emerging local plan.

Overall Structure, Style and Format

- 3.3** The structure of the new local plan is intended to be clear and simple to follow. The initial few sections of the preferred policy options paper explain the purpose of the document, outline the context within which it has been prepared, including recent changes to national policy and identify the key challenges and opportunities to be tackled in the period up to 2041.
- 3.4** Drawing on this and consultation feedback to date, the paper sets out an ambitious vision of West Oxfordshire in 2041, which is supported by a series of overarching plan objectives.

- 3.5** The bulk of the consultation paper is then devoted to a series of initial draft policies, which, for ease of reference, are split into strategically important ‘core policies’, geographically specific ‘placed-based’ policies, individual settlement strategies and ‘development management’ policies.
- 3.6** Whilst the preferred policy options paper is relatively lengthy, it is anticipated that splitting the policies in this manner will make it simple for the reader to navigate.
- 3.7** In terms of wording style, Members should note that in the interests of promoting digital planning, Officers have used AI technology to assist with drafting the content of the preferred policy options paper. This has helped to achieve a consistent style of wording throughout the document.

Draft Vision and Objectives

- 3.8** The preferred policy options paper includes a draft vision of West Oxfordshire in 2041. This is based around the six main themes which have underpinned consultation on the local plan to date:
- Tackling the climate and ecological emergency
 - Healthy, safe, strong and inclusive communities
 - An enhanced natural and built environment
 - Attractive, accessible and thriving places
 - Meeting the housing needs of all
 - A vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy
- 3.9** Sitting alongside the draft vision is a series of draft plan objectives which have been updated and refined in response to previous consultation feedback and are now concise and focused.
- 3.10** The purpose of the vision and objectives is to provide the start point and context for the policies and proposals that follow.

Draft Core Policies

- 3.11** The preferred policy options paper includes 12 draft ‘core policies’. These are intended to apply across the District and seek to address the most strategically important issues for West Oxfordshire including the climate and ecological emergency, the overall pattern of development, the provision of new homes and employment space, infrastructure provision, health, design quality and the historic and natural environment.
- 3.12** Unlike the current Local Plan which is relatively ‘light’ on climate related issues, draft Core Policy 1 seeks to embed climate change at the heart of the new local plan, requiring all new development to actively support the UK’s net zero target by minimising carbon emissions, maximising energy efficiency and renewable energy use, integrating climate-resilient and nature-based design, and demonstrating long-term adaptability.
- 3.13** Core Policy 2 relates to the settlement hierarchy and takes a similar approach to the current Local Plan but embeds the hierarchy into a policy to ensure give it an enhanced status and to ensure links with other policies are clear.

- 3.14** The policy identifies Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton as ‘Tier 1 – Principal Towns’ with Bampton, Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham, Long Hanborough. Salt Cross (new) and Woodstock identified as ‘Tier 2 – Service Centres’.
- 3.15** A number of larger villages are identified as ‘Tier 3 – Villages’, with Tier 4 relating to small villages, hamlets and open countryside.
- 3.16** In terms of the overall pattern of development, draft Core Policy 3 takes the current local plan as its starting point in proposing a ‘hierarchical’ approach, with future growth to be focused primarily at the Tier 1 Principal Towns, followed by proportionately less taking place at the Tier 2 Service Centres and Tier 3 villages respectively, with a restrictive approach proposed to continue in Tier 4 areas.
- 3.17** The new strategy does however place a particular emphasis on the opportunity for transformational growth at Carterton through the creation of scalable new communities within the ‘rural fringe’ of the town to complement investment in the town and unlock its economic and social potential including its relationship with RAF Brize Norton.
- 3.18** It also places a stronger emphasis on committed and future growth taking place along key transport corridors including the A40 and A44, the former offering the potential to support the aspiration for a rail connection from Carterton to Oxford via Witney and Eynsham.
- 3.19** With regards to the provision of new homes, draft Core Policy 4 explains that the overall housing requirement of the new Local Plan will be 14,480 homes in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2041. This is equivalent to 905 homes per year in line with the current housing need for West Oxfordshire as calculated via the standard method.
- 3.20** This level of need is proposed to be applied from 1st April 2025 reflecting the fact that for the purposes of plan-making, the provisions of the new NPPF (December 2024) apply from 12 March 2025 onwards.
- 3.21** To provide a suitable ‘buffer’, it is proposed that the new Local Plan identifies an overall housing supply of around 16,000 homes in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2041. This reflects the fact that some sites may not come forward as expected, or at all, and reduces the risk of the Council not being able to demonstrate an adequate 5-year housing land supply.
- 3.22** Anticipated sources of housing supply include existing planning permissions, a reasonable allowance for speculative ‘windfall’ development and site allocations.
- 3.23** To complement the provision of new homes, draft Core Policy 4 outlines an indicative range of employment land requirements for office and research and development and industrial floorspace. As with new homes, the intention is that this will be met from a combination of existing planning permissions and site allocations.

- 3.24** In terms of the remaining core policies, noteworthy points of difference with the current local plan include a much stronger approach towards the provision of supporting infrastructure, with a requirement for site-specific Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDPs) to be submitted with all major developments (i.e. 10 or more homes or > 1,000 sqm for commercial uses).
- 3.25** Draft Core Policy 7 adopts an integrated approach to water management, requiring development proposals to consider all aspects of the water environment (flood risk, drainage, supply, disposal etc.) holistically and evidenced through site-specific water management strategies for major development.
- 3.26** Draft Core Policy 9 seeks to embed health and well-being into the new Local Plan, taking inspiration from the approach at Salt Cross Garden Village and reflecting the Oxfordshire-wide agreed principles of healthy place-shaping.
- 3.27** In terms of transport and movement, draft Core Policy 10 – Sustainable Transport places a much stronger emphasis on active and low-carbon modes of travel and aligns with recent changes to national policy which emphasise the importance of a ‘vision-led’ approach to identifying future transport solutions. The policy also places a strong emphasis on the quality of streets and spaces and the need for inclusivity including the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility.
- 3.28** Draft Core Policy 11 relates to the historic environment and seeks to strengthen the approach of the current local plan, including through a new requirement for heritage impact assessments (HIAs) for all development proposals that affect, or have the potential to affect, heritage assets.
- 3.29** Finally, draft Core Policy 12 seeks to strengthen the Council’s approach in relation to the natural environment, with new requirements for development linked to the issue of nature recovery, including alignment with the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) habitat creation and connectivity and ecological impact assessments for major development.

Place-Based Policies

- 3.30** To complement the overarching strategic policies outlined above, the preferred policy options paper includes a number of draft ‘place-based’ policies which are intended to apply to specific geographic locations.
- 3.31** Draft Policy PL1 relates to the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) which covers around one third of the District and is crucial to its future attractiveness and prosperity. The policy strengthens the approach of the current local plan, requiring close alignment with the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and proactive conservation and enhancement which actively contributes to the natural beauty of the National Landscape. This strengthened approach reflects the new duty which has been placed on all local authorities including West Oxfordshire to ‘seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area’.

- 3.32** A new draft policy relating to the Oxford Green Belt is proposed (draft Policy PL2). The current local plan does not include a specific Green Belt policy and instead, defers largely to national policy. The new draft policy is intended to complement the national policy position and articulate how development proposals within the Oxford Green Belt will be considered in a West Oxfordshire context. The policy adopts a positive approach, encouraging suitable forms of development, namely the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land and other 'grey belt' land, whilst protecting the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt designation.
- 3.33** Draft Policy PL3 sets out a comprehensive strategy for conserving and managing the Windrush Valley, emphasising natural flood management, ecological restoration, and heritage preservation. It requires development proposals to enhance water quality, biodiversity, and natural hydrological processes, while aligning with the objectives of the relevant Conservation Target Areas (CTAs). In different sections of the valley - Upper, Windrush in Witney, and Lower - proposals must support tailored goals, such as rewilding, restoring historic landscapes, integrating heritage assets, and delivering biodiversity net gain post-mineral extraction. Across the entire valley, an integrated approach is expected, involving stakeholder engagement, cumulative impact assessment, and a long-term commitment to protecting ecological and cultural integrity.
- 3.34** Draft Policy PL4 focuses on the protection, restoration, and enhancement of the Wychwood Forest's habitats, biodiversity, and ecological connectivity. Development within or near the forest must conserve key habitats such as ancient woodlands and wetlands, prevent ecological harm, and deliver measurable biodiversity net gain through habitat creation, restoration, and long-term management.
- 3.35** Draft Policy PL5 safeguards a strategic corridor of land between Carterton and Yarnton to enable the potential development of a future rail solution for West Oxfordshire, aimed at improving regional connectivity and supporting sustainable transport. Within this corridor, development must not obstruct the rail project and may be required to contribute financially or in-kind to its delivery. Potential station locations are broadly identified at Carterton, Witney, and Eynsham, subject to further analysis.
- 3.36** Draft Policy PL6 is focused on protecting, conserving, and enhancing the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) and its setting. Proposals must be informed by thorough heritage and visual assessments, align with the WHS Management Plan, and involve early engagement with heritage bodies and the local community to ensure the site's long-term protection and enhancement.

Settlement Strategies

3.37 The current Local Plan is based on five broad 'sub-areas'. In contrast, the intention with the new Local Plan is that it will include specific 'settlement strategies' for all Tier 1 - Principal Towns and Tier 2 Service Centres:

Tier 1 – Principal Towns

- Witney
- Carterton
- Chipping Norton

Tier 2 – Service Centres

- Bampton
- Burford
- Charlbury
- Eynsham
- Long Hanborough
- Salt Cross Garden Village (new)
- Woodstock

3.38 With the exception of Salt Cross Garden Village, an individual draft vision and strategy has been developed for each settlement, tailored to the specific characteristics, opportunities, and challenges of each location. Where applicable, existing Neighbourhood Plans have been considered and reflected as far as possible.

3.39 For Salt Cross, reference is made to the draft Area Action Plan (AAP), which already establishes a comprehensive vision, set of objectives, and a strategic planning framework to guide the long-term development of the site.

3.40 Because Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Burford, and Woodstock each have defined town centre boundaries, they will also have specific town centre policies. Initial draft policies are set out in the preferred policy options paper and focus on supporting the vitality, resilience, and sustainable growth of these key commercial and community hubs.

3.41 Beyond the principal towns and service centres, there are too many individual villages for the local plan to address each individually. As such, a broader, high-level 'rural area' strategy is proposed to cover:

- Tier 3 – Villages; and
- Tier 4 - Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside

3.42 This provides an overarching approach for managing development and change in the more dispersed parts of the District, recognising their varied needs, environmental sensitivity, and infrastructure constraints.

Development Locations

- 3.43** Where applicable, the settlement strategies refer to current local plan allocations that do not yet have planning permission in whole and explain the current position and progress being made with each. The collective assumption is that these remaining allocations will deliver around 5,200 new homes in the period up to 2041.
- 3.44** Taking account of these, plus existing commitments and anticipated windfall, the residual number of new homes likely to be accommodated on new site allocations is around 6,500.
- 3.45** In accordance with the proposed spatial strategy, it is anticipated that the majority of these will be provided within and on the rural fringes of Carterton and at Witney, with opportunities at Chipping Norton being limited by the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB).
- 3.46** New allocations are also anticipated at the Tier 2 Service Centres, including those with good public transport accessibility. In the interests of encouraging swift delivery from smaller allocations, which often come forward very quickly and support small and medium enterprise housebuilders, a number of the Tier 3 Villages will also be expected to play a role. At this point in time, in accordance with the proposed spatial strategy, Officers do not expect to propose any site allocations in the Tier 4 rural area.
- 3.47** The draft preferred policy options paper outlines this broad, proposed approach and will be followed up in the autumn with a further, focused Regulation 18 consultation on preferred new development areas.

Development Management Policies

- 3.48** The remainder of the preferred policy options paper sets out a number of draft 'development management' policies. These are thematically grouped under the overall plan objectives and are intended to cover a broad range of day-to-day issues which typically come up when planning applications are being considered.
- 3.49** Because there are a large number of draft development management policies (38 in total) for ease of reference, a summary overview is attached to this report at Annex B. This briefly summarises the key purpose of each policy and highlights any particular differences with the adopted Local Plan 2031.
- 3.50** Key differences include:
- A new, standalone policy on key development principles updating and streamlining those set out in the current Local Plan Policy OS2;
 - Strengthened requirements in relation to the provision of Green Infrastructure in new development;
 - New policy relating to the establishment of healthy food environments;
 - New policy requiring net zero carbon development in line with the approach being taken at Salt Cross Garden Village;
 - Clearer and stronger approach on renewable and low-carbon energy, including increased support for community-led proposals;

- New policy on retro-fitting buildings;
- Strengthened approach in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) with increased emphasis on quality alongside specific %age targets;
- New standalone policies on waste and the circular economy, trees and hedgerows, light pollution and dark skies and air quality and pollution;
- New policy encouraging the re-use of previously developed land and achieving higher densities in sustainable locations;
- Approach to parking standards in new developments updated to align with Oxfordshire County Council's current requirements;
- New standalone policy relating to speculative windfall housing development and the criteria/approach to be applied;
- Increased policy support for social rented housing;
- Strengthened approach in relation to the provision of specialist housing for older people;
- New policy on community-led housing;
- New policy on learning, skills and education including a requirement for community employment plans (CEPs) on larger developments; and
- New policy on digital infrastructure to support and reflect the increased importance of home and hybrid working.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1** Subject to the approval of Members, the preferred policy options paper attached at Annex A will be published for a period of public consultation beginning in June and anticipated to run for around 8-weeks.
- 4.2** The consultation will comprise a combination of online digital engagement and in-person events, the nature and scope of which is currently under consideration. Further information on these consultation events and activities will be publicised in due course.
- 4.3** In parallel, Officers will continue to prepare and commission further supporting technical evidence in support of the emerging draft Local Plan.
- 4.4** The intention is that this additional evidence will be taken into account along with feedback to the preferred policy options consultation and will feed into a further, 'focused' Regulation 18 consultation in early autumn. The purpose of this will be to identify preferred new development areas to help meet the residual housing requirement of around 6,500 new homes.
- 4.5** Beyond that, Officers will then look to prepare a full draft version of the new Local Plan in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

- 4.6** The timing of this will depend on a number of factors including consultation feedback to the preferred policy options, the proposed focused consultation on preferred development locations and progress with relevant supporting technical evidence and analysis.

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.

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 is being 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** The preferred policy options consultation paper will be supported by an integrated health an equality impact assessment (HEIA) and this will be further updated as the draft plan progresses to the formal stages of preparation.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** The climate and ecological emergencies form a central component of the preferred policy options consultation paper including ambitious policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation, renewable and low carbon energy, retrofitting and net zero carbon development.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** None.