



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE - 22 OCTOBER 2025
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN PREFERRED SPATIAL OPTIONS CONSULTATION
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr 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
Summary/Purpose	To consider the Local Plan Preferred Spatial 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 – Preferred Policy Options Consultation Summary Report (September 2025) Annex B – Preferred Spatial Options Consultation Paper (October 2025) Annex C - West Eynsham SDA A40 Access Options Assessment (June 2025) Annex D – Updated Local Development Scheme – LDS (October 2025)
Recommendation(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Executive resolves to:2. Note the content of the report.3. Agree that the Preferred Policy Options Consultation Summary Report attached at Annex A be published online.4. Agree that the Preferred Spatial Options paper attached at Annex B be published for the purposes of public consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.5. Authorise the Planning Policy Manager to make any necessary minor amendments to the preferred spatial options paper in

	<p>consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Head of Planning, prior to consultation taking place.</p> <p>6. Agree that the West Eynsham SDA A40 Access Options Assessment (June 2025) attached at Annex C be published online.</p> <p>7. Agree that the updated Local Development Scheme attached at Annex D be published online and made available in hard copy format in agreed 'deposit' locations across the District.</p>
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 has been the subject of extensive public consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.</p> <p>Most recently, this included public consultation on preferred policy options from 27 June – 8 August 2025.</p> <p>Building on the feedback from that consultation, further public consultation is now proposed in relation to preferred spatial options.</p> <p>This will enable the Council to move towards the formal publication of a full draft Local Plan in the new year which will be published for a statutory 6-week period of public consultation before being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Members will be aware that the District Council is producing a new Local Plan to replace the current Local Plan adopted in September 2018.

1.2 The purpose of this report is fourfold:

- To consider the feedback received to the most recent Local Plan preferred policy options consultation in June/August 2025 (in respect of the plan period, settlement hierarchy and spatial strategy) as set out in the consultation summary report attached at Annex A.
- To consider the Preferred Spatial Options consultation paper attached at Annex B.
- To consider the content of the West Eynsham SDA A40 Access Options Assessment attached at Annex C and note its relevance as a material planning consideration for future planning applications at the West Eynsham SDA and Salt Cross Garden Village.
- To consider the timetable for progressing the Local Plan through to formal publication under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 as set out in the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex D.

2. PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS – OVERVIEW OF CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

2.1 The emerging draft Local Plan has been the subject of extensive stakeholder engagement, with major public consultations undertaken in 2022 and 2023. Following a short delay arising from changes to national policy, consultation on a series of preferred policy options took place from 27 June – 8 August 2025.

2.2 This included consultation on a draft vision, revised plan objectives and a series of preferred policy options including:

- Core Policies
- Place-Based Policies
- Settlement Strategy Policies
- Development Management Policies

2.3 The consultation comprised a combination of online digital material and a series of in-person events. It was very successful with around 1,500 comments from approximately 400 respondents.

2.4 A summary report of the consultation has been prepared and is attached at Annex A.

2.5 Whilst generally, the feedback was very positive, a number of clear themes and areas of potential concern have emerged. Those issues of direct relevance to the proposed spatial options consultation are briefly summarised below.

- **Plan Period**

The end date for the Local Plan should be extended to at least 2042 to ensure that it covers a minimum of 15-year period post adoption.

- **Settlement Hierarchy**

The consultation revealed a strong consensus that while the principle of a settlement hierarchy is broadly supported, its current application is seen as overly simplistic and in need of refinement. Many respondents, particularly from Tier 3 villages, expressed concern that the classification does not accurately reflect the character, infrastructure, or service provision of their communities. Villages such as Combe, Fulbrook, and Ascott-under-Wychwood were frequently cited as examples where the Tier 3 designation feels inappropriate, given their limited amenities and lack of public transport.

A recurring theme was the fear that the hierarchy could lead to disproportionate development in small villages, with some warning that hundreds of new homes could overwhelm local infrastructure and fundamentally alter the rural character of these places. This was especially concerning in areas within the Cotswolds National Landscape, where landscape and heritage considerations are paramount.

- **Spatial Strategy**

The spatial strategy is broadly supported in principle, particularly its hierarchical approach to distributing growth across West Oxfordshire. However, many respondents feel that the policy lacks clarity and precision, especially in how it defines and applies development scales across different settlement tiers. There is a strong desire for a more transparent, evidence-based framework that ensures development is proportionate, sustainable, and responsive to local context.

2.6 As these are key aspects of the overall Local Plan, Officers propose to revisit these issues as part of the preferred spatial options consultation. Further explanation is provided in Section 3 below.

2.7 Other important issues such as the provision of supporting infrastructure and the need for more clarity on unmet housing need arising from Oxford City will be addressed as Officers work up the Regulation 19 draft Local Plan and supporting evidence base in early 2026.

3. PREFERRED SPATIAL OPTIONS CONSULTATION

- 3.1** The preferred spatial options consultation paper is attached at Annex B.
- 3.2** Subject to the approval of the Executive, the paper will be published for a 7-week period of public consultation from early November onwards.
- 3.3** This will represent the fourth and final stage of consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 3.4** Following this, Officers will prepare the draft version of the Local Plan which will be formally published under Regulation 19 for a statutory 6-week period of public consultation before being formally submitted for independent examination.
- 3.5** A summary overview of the key aspects of the preferred spatial options paper is provided below for ease of reference.

Plan Period

- 3.6** National policy (the NPPF) suggests that Local Plans should cover a period of at least 15-years from the date of adoption. To date, Officers have been working on the basis that the new Local Plan would have an 'end-date' of 31st March 2041. However, through the most recent consultation, strong views have been expressed that this should be extended to better reflect the likely date of adoption and to provide a greater degree of flexibility.
- 3.7** Officers have further considered this issue and concluded that it would be appropriate to extend the plan period by 2-years, to 31st March 2043. This is on the basis that it is unlikely the new Local Plan will be adopted before 1st April 2027 and possibly beyond then – depending on how the examination progresses.
- 3.8** Extending the plan period to 2043 would help to ensure that this aspect of the plan does not raise any concerns with the appointed Inspector but would mean that the overall housing requirement increases by 1,810 homes based on West Oxfordshire's current standard method level of housing need (i.e. 2 additional years at 905 homes per year).

Settlement Hierarchy

- 3.9** As outlined above and detailed in the consultation summary report (Annex A) a large number of comments were received in relation to the proposed local plan 'Settlement Hierarchy'.
- 3.10** At the preferred policy options stage in June, a 4-tier approach was proposed with the District's principal towns (Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton) identified as Tier 1 – Principal Towns, key larger settlements such as Burford and Woodstock identified as Tier 2 – Service Centres, a number of smaller settlements such as North Leigh and Stanton Harcourt identified as Tier 3 – Villages and the rest of the District falling with Tier 4 – Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside.
- 3.11** Where each settlement 'sits' within this tiered hierarchy is important because it influences a number of other local plan policies including the overall spatial strategy and in turn, the general 'scale' of future development that is anticipated to come forward in each location.

- 3.12** As a result, this aspect of the June consultation attracted a significant level of response with many respondents expressing concern that the ‘grouping’ of individual settlements in the manner proposed is too blunt an instrument and doesn’t properly reflect the individual characteristics of each town or village.
- 3.13** For example, in relation to the proposed Tier 2 - Service Centres, many respondents felt that Long Hanborough and Bampton should not be grouped alongside Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham and Woodstock.
- 3.14** Similarly, in relation to the proposed Tier 3 – Villages, a number of respondents highlighted important differences between larger villages such as North Leigh, Stonesfield and Minster Lovell, compared to smaller villages such as Fulbrook and Ascott-under-Wychwood.
- 3.15** As a result, Officers have undertaken further analysis and are now proposing to identify five settlement tiers as follows:
- Tier 1 – Principal Towns
 - Tier 2 – Service Centres
 - Tier 3 – Large Villages
 - Tier 4 – Medium Villages
 - Tier 5 – Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside
- 3.16** The settlements previously identified within Tiers 1 and 2 are proposed to remain the same but the relatively large number of villages previously listed within Tier 3 have now been split into a ‘large’ and ‘medium’ category (Tier 3 and Tier 4).

Spatial Strategy

- 3.17** Through the June preferred policy options consultation, views were sought on a proposed spatial strategy (Core Policy 3).
- 3.18** Whilst the general feedback has been positive (see Annex A – Consultation Summary Report) concerns have been expressed about the scale of future development that could potentially come forward in some locations – particularly in light of known pressures around infrastructure capacity where significant growth has already taken place in recent years.
- 3.19** To summarise, the preferred policy options consultation in June identified the following residential development ‘classification’:
- Small-scale development 1-10 units
 - Medium-scale development 11-300 units
 - Strategic-scale development 300+ units

3.20 On this basis, it was suggested that:

- Tier 1 Principal Towns could accommodate small, medium and strategic-scale development.
- Tier 2 Service Centres could accommodate small and medium-scale development with additional strategic-scale development (beyond that which is already committed through existing permissions and allocations) only taking place by exception and where necessary to meet identified development needs.
- Tier 3 Villages could accommodate small and medium-scale development but at a more limited scale than Tier 2 Service Centres – guided by the existing size and relative sustainability of each settlement in terms of their available service and facilities.
- Tier 4 Small villages, hamlets and open countryside could accommodate small-scale development only.

3.21 Notwithstanding the policy caveats regarding the existing size and relative sustainability of each settlement, this proposed approach has raised concerns that smaller villages could be put under pressure to accommodate excessively large developments of up to 300 dwellings,

3.22 Officers have since further considered the matter and have concluded that an alternative approach is required to better reflect the revised settlement hierarchy outlined above and the scale of development which is likely to be acceptable in each location.

3.23 It is therefore proposed that four different ‘scales’ of residential development are identified rather than three. These are:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Small-scale residential development | 1-10 units |
| • Medium-scale residential development | 11 – 50 units |
| • Large-scale residential development | 51 – 300 units |
| • Strategic-scale residential development | 300+ units |

3.24 It is also proposed that the spatial strategy be updated to reflect the revised settlement hierarchy outlined above.

3.25 Views on this revised approach will be sought through the preferred spatial options consultation before the final approach is agreed as part of the Regulation 19 draft Local Plan.

Preferred Spatial Options

3.26 Within this overall context, the preferred spatial options consultation paper (Annex B) then moves on to consider more specifically, potential areas of future development.

3.27 For ease of reference, the paper first considers much larger ‘strategic’ spatial options capable of accommodating 300+ dwellings before moving onto consider other, smaller ‘non-strategic’ options.

- 3.28** It should be noted that in some instances, whilst the gross site area of some of the spatial options suggests they are technically capable of accommodating 300+ homes, they have been included as smaller non-strategic options because of site constraints that serve to reduce the likely acceptable quantum of development.
- 3.29** In relation to both strategic and other non-strategic spatial options, the paper first considers the existing Local Plan 2031 allocations that do not yet have planning permission in whole, before moving on to consider new spatial options that have been identified as being potentially suitable for development via the Council's updated Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA).
- 3.30** The intention is that the updated HELAA will be published alongside the preferred spatial options consultation paper as supporting evidence.

Strategic Spatial Options

- 3.31** The preferred spatial options consultation paper confirms that there are five existing site allocations from the current adopted Local Plan 2031 capable of delivering 300 or more new homes but that do not yet have planning permission in whole.
- 3.32** This includes Salt Cross Garden Village, West Eynsham SDA, North Witney SDA, East Chipping Norton SDA and the REEMA North and Central site in Carterton.
- 3.33** The paper explains the progress which has been made in relation to each site and outlines the Council's intention to refresh and update each allocation through the new Local Plan, taking account of any changes in circumstance since the previous Local Plan was adopted in 2018.
- 3.34** Cumulatively, these refreshed and revised allocations are anticipated to be able to deliver around 5,375 homes in the period to 2043.
- 3.35** Members should note that in relation to the West Eynsham SDA, the spatial options paper provides an update on a recent access options assessment which was completed in June 2025 to help inform the most appropriate point of access into the site from the A40.
- 3.36** Because the access options assessment is of material relevance in planning terms to both the West Eynsham SDA and Salt Cross Garden Village, a copy is attached to this report at Appendix C- the intention being that it will be published as background supporting material during the preferred spatial options consultation.
- 3.37** Having outlined the position in relation to the existing local plan allocations capable of delivering 300+ homes, the preferred spatial options paper then outlines a number of new, potentially suitable locations for future development that are similarly strategic in scale. These are locations that have been identified by Officers as having some development potential based on the analysis undertaken to date – primarily the updated HELAA.

3.38 For each location, the consultation paper provides a summary overview including constraints and opportunities and the overall rationale for having identified it as potentially suitable for development. Because some of the options are presented as a 'range' cumulatively, it is anticipated that the strategic preferred spatial options could potentially deliver between 7,150 and 8,250 new homes by 2043 together with 20 hectares of employment space.

3.39 It is important to note that this is an initial consultation only and a considerable amount of further evidence and information will be needed before a final decision can be made on which strategic options to include in the draft plan in the new year. This will include stakeholder feedback and further evidence on a range of topics including viability, infrastructure and transport impact.

4. Other Non-Strategic Spatial Options

4.1 The preferred spatial options paper confirms that there is one existing site allocation from the current adopted Local Plan 2031 that has the potential to deliver a smaller residential scheme, the Woodford Way Car Park in Witney. The paper seeks views on whether the existing allocation should be updated and refreshed through the new local plan, including a slight increase in the number of homes from 50 – 75 to better reflect site capacity.

4.2 Whilst the adopted Local Plan 2031 includes another smaller housing allocation that does not yet have planning permission at Myrtle Farm in Long Hanborough (50 homes), the landowner has confirmed they have no intention of bringing the site forward and so the intention is to de-allocate it.

4.3 The preferred spatial options paper then goes on to outline a number of new, potentially suitable locations for future development that are non-strategic in scale (i.e. capable of accommodating less than 300 homes). Cumulatively, these have the potential to deliver between 850- 900 dwellings along with 10 hectares of employment space.

4.4 These are locations that have been identified by Officers as having some development potential based on the analysis undertaken to date – primarily the updated HELAA.

4.5 As with the strategic spatial options, for each location, the consultation paper provides a summary overview including constraints and opportunities and the overall rationale for having identified it as potentially suitable for development.

5. LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE

5.1 The Council's most recently published Local Plan timetable is set out in its Local Development Scheme (LDS) published in March 2025. It was prepared on the basis that the Regulation 18 consultation on preferred policy options would take place in May 2025, leading to formal publication of the Regulation 19 draft Local Plan in October 2025 and submission by March 2026.

5.2 As a result of the decision to introduce the additional Regulation 18 stage of consultation on the preferred spatial options (Annex B) it is necessary to amend the timetable.

5.3 A revised LDS has therefore been prepared and is attached at Annex D.

5.4 In terms of the Local Plan, the key dates to note are now as follows:

- Regulation 18 Preferred Spatial Options consultation Nov/Dec 2025
- Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan consultation May/June 2026
- Submission September 2026

5.5 In preparing the updated LDS, Officers have also taken the opportunity to update the key dates in relation to the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP) and also the latest position regarding Neighbourhood Planning.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 By way of next steps, Officers propose to publish the Preferred Policy Options Consultation Summary Report (Annex A) online as soon as possible.

6.2 Subject to the approval of Members, the preferred spatial options paper attached at Annex B will be published for a 7-week period of public consultation from the beginning of November 2025.

6.3 The West Eynsham SDA A40 Access Options Assessment attached at Annex C will be published online as background technical evidence and the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex D will be published online and also made available in the deposit locations listed in the document.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

7.1 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.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 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.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 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. Independent legal advice will be sought as part of this process.

10. RISK ASSESSMENT

10.1 The report presents no significant risks.

11. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 11.1** The Local Plan 2043 is supported by an integrated health and equality impact assessment (HEIA).

12. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** The climate and ecological emergencies form a central component of the emerging draft local plan and have been influential factors in the selection of preferred spatial options outlined in Annex B.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1** None.