

Local Plan 2034 – Issues and Scope

A new study of housing need in Oxfordshire has indicated that more housing is needed than has been planned for in the current local plan (Core Strategy). A local plan contains policies that are used when determining planning applications, and identify key locations for where major new planned developments will take place.

In 2012 the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy was adopted which secured the land needed for 11,487 homes to 2027. In April 2014 a document called the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (or SHMA) was published providing updated housing need figures across Oxfordshire to 2031. The document identified that South Oxfordshire could need up to additional 5,900 homes on top of the number already allocated. This has meant SODC have needed to review their existing plan so that it looks ahead to 2034.

A new method of calculating housing need has since been established nationally. This would result in fewer homes being required across Oxfordshire. The Government has however agreed that the Oxfordshire authorities can continue to use the SHMA housing figures to attract economic growth in exchange for a share of £215 million pounds' worth of infrastructure funding. This is as part of a Housing and Growth Deal arranged between the Government and the Oxfordshire authorities that was first agreed in November 2017. A Written Ministerial Statement has given this particular deal weight in deciding the future of plan making across Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

The Local Plan 2034, once adopted, will soon after be joined by another high-level land use plan that covers the whole of Oxfordshire, including Oxford City. As part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal the Government have provided funding for a joint plan that will map growth across the future decades to be prepared and agreed to under partnership working across the Oxfordshire authorities.

This Joint Strategic Spatial Plan is known as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This Plan will seek to coordinate growth at a County level to best take advantage of major infrastructure initiatives such as East-West Rail and the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway. These two projects are planned as part of a bid to promote nationally significant levels of economic growth associated with the “Oxford – Milton Keynes - Cambridge Arc”. This geographic corridor was judged as having the potential to act as a knowledge cluster of global importance and influence by the National Infrastructure Commission in November 2016. New towns and large villages are expected as part of the Commission’s vision to create one million jobs and houses by 2050 across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

The growth proposed will be allocated at the strategic, or District level. It is expected that new or altered powers will be given to Growth Deal communities allowing them to raise money for vital infrastructure through tax or compulsory purchase initiatives. Each District Council will then be expected to produce new local plans detailing where and when the new communities, and associated infrastructure, will be developed.

Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge Transport

East – West rail is a relatively established idea. The Government has committed to restoring the dual “Varsity” railway line that used to connect Oxford and Cambridge. The first section, Oxford to Bicester, was completed in December 2016. Phase 2 will see Bicester connected to Bedford, via Winslow and Bletchley, with a branch line from Aylesbury enjoying similar connections. Some services could start as early as 2023. Phase 3, from Bedford to Cambridge, has yet to have its final route agreed but it is hoped work will be underway by the mid-2020s. Interested parties are already looking to extend the line eastwards, to Norwich, Ipswich and the port of Felixstowe.

The Oxford – Milton Keynes - Cambridge Expressway has been more contentious. This proposal arose from the National Infrastructure Commission’s investigations into the Oxford – Cambridge geographic corridor. It is suggested that a dual carriageway is built to motorway standards between the A34, south-west of Oxford, via Milton-Keynes and on to the A14 near Cambridge. Some potential route choices have been selected but other sections are currently only shown as vague “corridors”, meaning the final route could be anywhere within a strip of land several kilometres wide. Within Oxfordshire, two choices are being looked at, either taking the route west of Oxford, via Bicester and Winslow to Milton Keynes; or around the south of Oxford, north of Abingdon and Aylesbury and onwards to Milton Keynes and beyond. The choice may be made as early as summer 2019.