

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL PLAN

- 1.1 This Local Plan sets out the District Council's policies and proposals for development and land use in West Oxfordshire, including measures for the improvement of the natural and built environment and management of traffic. It is also the basis for co-ordinating future development with the provision of essential infrastructure and services.
- 1.2 The role of the Plan is to protect the existing high quality environment, the heritage and the natural resources of West Oxfordshire whilst meeting the social and economic needs of the people who live and/or work in the area as well as the needs of tourists or other visitors.
- 1.3 People need homes, places to work and services such as good transport and community facilities. The Local Plan identifies where development can take place in the District, the criteria against which it will be judged and the standards it must reach.

THE NEED FOR THIS PLAN

- 1.4 The district-wide West Oxfordshire Local Plan adopted in 1997 covers the years up to the end of March 2001. However, many of its land use proposals, particularly the major development areas at Witney and Carterton, will not be completed until well after 2001. The development process for large sites of mixed land uses can take many years between the first land allocation in a Local Plan and the first detailed planning permission and start on site.
- 1.5 A replacement Local Plan is needed to implement the requirements of the adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan which sets out the broad strategy including housing targets for the period up to 2011 (and beyond). This requires significant additional housing provisions to be made in West Oxfordshire over and above the proposals of the 1997 adopted Local Plan. Most of this additional development is to take place in Witney, the largest town.

REVIEW PROCESS

- 1.6 This Local Plan covers the period 1996 to 2011. When the 2011 Structure Plan proposals were finalised (Plan adopted in August 1998) the District Council published two separate consultation papers on the key housing issues facing West Oxfordshire – firstly, covering the District outside Witney (May 1998) and secondly, Witney itself and an urban expansion (September 1998).
- 1.7 The results of public consultation have helped inform preparation of this Plan. The Draft Plan was placed on First Deposit in 2001 and on Revised Deposit in 2003. The public inquiry took place in 2004.

THE PLAN IN ITS WIDER CONTEXT

- 1.8 Planning decisions made locally in West Oxfordshire are strongly influenced by events taking place nationally and internationally. Environmental, economic and social issues are a global concern.

National Policies

- 1.9 National Planning Policy is established by the Government through legislation, Circulars, Planning Policy Guidance Notes (now Statements), White and Green Papers, Good Practice Guides and Ministerial Statements. All current national planning policy and advice has been taken into account in drawing up this Plan.

Regional and County Level

- 1.10 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires proposals in a Local Plan to be in general conformity with the Structure Plan. This Review Local Plan has been prepared within the framework of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 which in turn was drawn up under the regional planning guidance for the South East Region issued in 1994 covering the period up to 2011. In the latter stages of plan preparation due regard was given to the emerging Structure Plan 2016.
- 1.11 Regional guidance is issued by the Secretary of State after draft proposals submitted by regional planning bodies have been subject to

Introduction

public examination. Revised guidance for the South East Region for the period up to 2016 was issued in March 2001.

- I.12 Production of countywide local transport plans covering a five year period is a relatively new Government requirement. The transport strategy in the local transport plan and the land use strategy in the development plan should be complementary. The Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan is underpinned by the policies and proposals in this Review Local Plan.

District Level

- I.13 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan is a corporate document of the District Council. It will guide the work of the Council's Cabinet and Committees. This Review Plan has been prepared taking into account other strategies of the Council including the Council Plan, Housing, Economic Development, Rural Issues, Leisure, Tourism and Arts and Local Agenda 21.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

- I.14 Depending upon the scale and type of development proposed, many or only a few of the policies in the Local Plan may be relevant. However a proposal should always be assessed against all relevant policies. The Plan needs to be read as a whole. Just because a proposal may accord with one of the policies in the Plan it does not mean that planning permission will automatically be given. Certain policies apply only broad locational tests for specific land uses such as housing and employment, and should always be used in conjunction with the wide range of other policies, especially those found in the separate Environment Chapter.
- I.15 Some policies may appear to conflict with others, particularly where promotional policies are concerned. For example, the expansion and improvement of shopping and leisure facilities could increase the number of journeys made on local roads. These issues require a judgement to be made, taking into account any preferable alternatives available, as to whether the proposed development would materially harm the overall objectives of the Local Plan.

- I.16 Whilst this Plan provides a comprehensive set of policies against which proposals for new development can be judged, it does not attempt to provide a policy for every eventuality. The Plan would be far too long-winded. In the case of development which is not addressed by a specific policy, the proposal will be judged against the Plan's objectives and the policies setting general criteria which all development should meet, particularly those set out in the Environment Chapter.

Departures from the Plan

- I.17 Once a Local Plan has completed the statutory stages through to adoption by the Council, considerable weight will be given to its provisions when considering development proposals. It will be the deciding factor in planning matters unless there are other clear and over-riding material considerations. This is laid down under Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991).
- I.18 From time to time, there may be cases where other material considerations outweigh the policies set out in the Plan and where it will be appropriate to grant permission which is not fully in accordance with them. Where the Council considers such a decision would represent a departure from the Plan, it will be advertised as a formal 'departure' and any representations considered, before a final decision is made.
- I.19 If a decision to depart from the provisions of the Plan would significantly prejudice implementation of the Plan's policies and proposals, the case will be referred to the Secretary of State who would have the opportunity to call-in the application for his determination.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

- 1.20 The Local Plan, together with the Structure Plan, does not include all planning guidance needed to fully assess development proposals in West Oxfordshire. Supplementary guidance already exists in the form of design advice and site specific planning briefs. Further guidance will be required to supplement the policies and proposals of this Plan. Where new guidance is prepared it will be subject to public consultation.
- 1.21 In addition, the Council encourages individual communities to prepare their own Village Appraisals to help identify the particular characteristics and existing features of that locality which are of special value. Such appraisals, where prepared within the Local Plan policy framework, can help inform decisions on planning applications or other potential changes to the local environment.

Introduction