

THE PLAN'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The Council's overall aim which guides all planning policies is:

To protect and enhance the natural and built environment in West Oxfordshire in order to pass a worthy legacy onto future generations whilst at the same time securing new development of a good environmental standard which will provide the necessary residential accommodation, jobs, infrastructure and facilities required to meet the social and economic needs of the local community as well as visitors to the area.

This reflects the Council Plan and its individual aims.

- 2.2 Within this overall aim, the following main land-use objectives have been set, against which the specific policies and proposals of the Plan can be measured:

Transport and Movement

- To guide new development to locations where the need to travel, particularly by private car, can be minimised, and where the opportunity exists for an increasing number of trips to be made on foot, by cycle and by public transport.
- To protect and improve the infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and users of public transport, and to ensure that new development includes appropriate facilities to offer people a satisfactory alternative to car travel.
- To maintain access to a transport network for all people and goods without degradation of the environment recognising that within a rural area the car will remain a main means of transport for people.

Housing

- To identify sufficient sources of new housing to meet the Structure Plan provision for West Oxfordshire during the period up to 31 March 2011 but at the same time to ensure that land is not released for major areas of new development until the appropriate level of supporting infrastructure and facilities is secured.
- To locate new housing where it will have the least adverse impact upon the character and resources of West Oxfordshire and to ensure that the new development makes a positive contribution to high quality built environment. Development will be phased to ensure that priority will be given to the re-use of previously developed land.
- To seek a range of new residential accommodation which provides a variety of sizes, types and affordability with special emphasis on the provision of dwellings for local people who cannot afford local housing market prices.

Employment

- To provide a wide range of sites and buildings in order to assist in maintaining a healthy local economy with a diversity of job opportunities to match the skills available throughout the District.
- To ensure that the location of employment sites and buildings does not erode the high environmental quality of West Oxfordshire, does not lead to an unacceptable increase in traffic levels and does not lead to overheating of the economy and stimulation of undesirable growth beyond that planned for in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan.

Town Centres and Shopping

- To enhance the character and improve the environment of the main town centres and to increase their attraction to all users.
- To maintain and improve where possible the overall range and quality of the District's shopping facilities but to resist proposals that would damage the vitality and viability of existing service centres and measures to improve them.

Tourism

To maintain West Oxfordshire's attraction to tourists through:

- promotion of its intrinsic qualities;
- protection and support of local cultural, heritage and environmental quality;
- encouragement of facilities which complement and, where possible, enhance the existing character of the District.

Leisure and Community Facilities

To make available throughout West Oxfordshire a range and mix of leisure, recreation, arts, cultural and community facilities through:

- the retention and improvement of existing facilities;
- the securing of new or improved facilities;
- the protection and support of local culture, heritage and environmental quality.

THE STRATEGY

Sustainable development

- 2.3 In preparing this Plan, considerable weight has been given to the principles of sustainable development¹. This is encompassed within the overall aim of the Plan which seeks to ensure that the District's environmental assets and quality of life are protected and enhanced. However the Plan can only deal with the land use planning aspects of such development which are capable of being addressed through the Local Plan process as prescribed by legislation.

¹ Sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

- 2.4 The Government has set out its approach to sustainable development which is based on four broad objectives:-

- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.
- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.
- Effective protection of the environment, and
- Prudent use of natural resources.

- 2.5 These objectives, Government guidance in general and the Oxfordshire Structure Plan in particular, provide the framework for the specific objectives, policies and proposals for West Oxfordshire set out in this Local Plan.

Use of previously developed land

- 2.6 The Government is committed to maximising the re-use of previously developed land and the conversion of existing buildings for new uses in order to promote regeneration and to minimise the amount of greenfield land being taken for development. The supply of unused or under-utilised buildings or previously developed land in West Oxfordshire suitable for redevelopment or new uses is limited. Agricultural buildings no longer required for their original purpose form a significant part of that supply in the rural areas. Such buildings are, however, classified as 'greenfield' in Government guidance.

- 2.7 The quality environment of West Oxfordshire and high land values normally ensure that opportunities for redevelopment or conversion are quickly seized. Empty properties or dereliction is not generally a problem needing to be addressed through local authority action although there are a few pockets in the urban areas with related infrastructure deficiencies that require attention. The Council recognises the need to bring forward for re-use empty properties, including upper floors above shops. Policies in this Plan facilitate such action.

- 2.8 The main opportunities for reuse of developed land lie within the towns, particularly Witney. A detailed assessment of the urban capacity of the five largest and more sustainable settlements was undertaken by the Council. This provides the basis for the housing proposals in this Plan on land within existing built up areas.

- 2.9 Achievement of the Structure Plan housing targets for West Oxfordshire necessitates further releases of greenfield sites even with maximum use of previously developed land. On the basis of present estimates of urban capacity, about 40%-45% of the houses built during the plan period will be on previously developed land.

Sequential approach to development location

- 2.10 The Council has adopted a systematic approach to deciding which areas and sites are most suitable for development and the sequence in which development should take place. This follows Government advice. The first priority was to identify suitable brownfield sites within or immediately adjoining towns and villages with a reasonable range of services and facilities; then to consider greenfield sites on the edge of key service centres which would satisfy the criteria set out in PPG3.

- 2.11 The Plan seeks to maximise the opportunities, albeit fairly limited, for use of previously developed land to meet the new development requirements during the plan period. These are the sites that will be promoted for early development.

Mixed-use development

2.12 The Government emphasises the importance of achieving mixed-use developments that contain more than one land use. For residential developments, a range of accommodation should be provided – in dwelling types and social mix. This approach is reflected in the policies in this Plan.

County Strategy

2.13 The Structure Plan 2011 “continues the ‘country towns’ strategy that was first endorsed by the Secretary of State in 1979 with Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney identified as the preferred locations for new development. The main aim of the strategy is to locate development in a way that is consistent with PPG13 while protecting the integrity of the Oxford Green Belt”. This strategy is continued in the replacement 2016 Structure Plan.

2.14 The key elements of the County Strategy are set out in Policy G1 of the Structure Plan which includes the following criteria:

- Protect and enhance the environment, character and natural resources of the county whilst delivering the level of development required in the Plan;
- Concentrate development in locations where:-
 - i the need to travel, particularly by private car, can be reduced;
 - ii walking, cycling and the use of public transport can be encouraged; and
 - iii a reasonable range of services and community facilities exist or can be provided;
- Make the best use of land and buildings within built up areas to reduce the need for the development of green field sites, while not permitting development on important open spaces.

2.15 Outside Witney, one of the ‘country towns’ identified for major new development, the Structure Plan (Policy H1) contains the following guidance for the location of new housing development:

“Most development should take place in larger settlements where a reasonable range of employment, services and community facilities exist or can be provided at reasonable cost. Significant additional housing development, including inappropriate infill, should be avoided where it is likely to result largely in commuting by cars to urban centres and where travel needs are unlikely to be well served by public transport.”

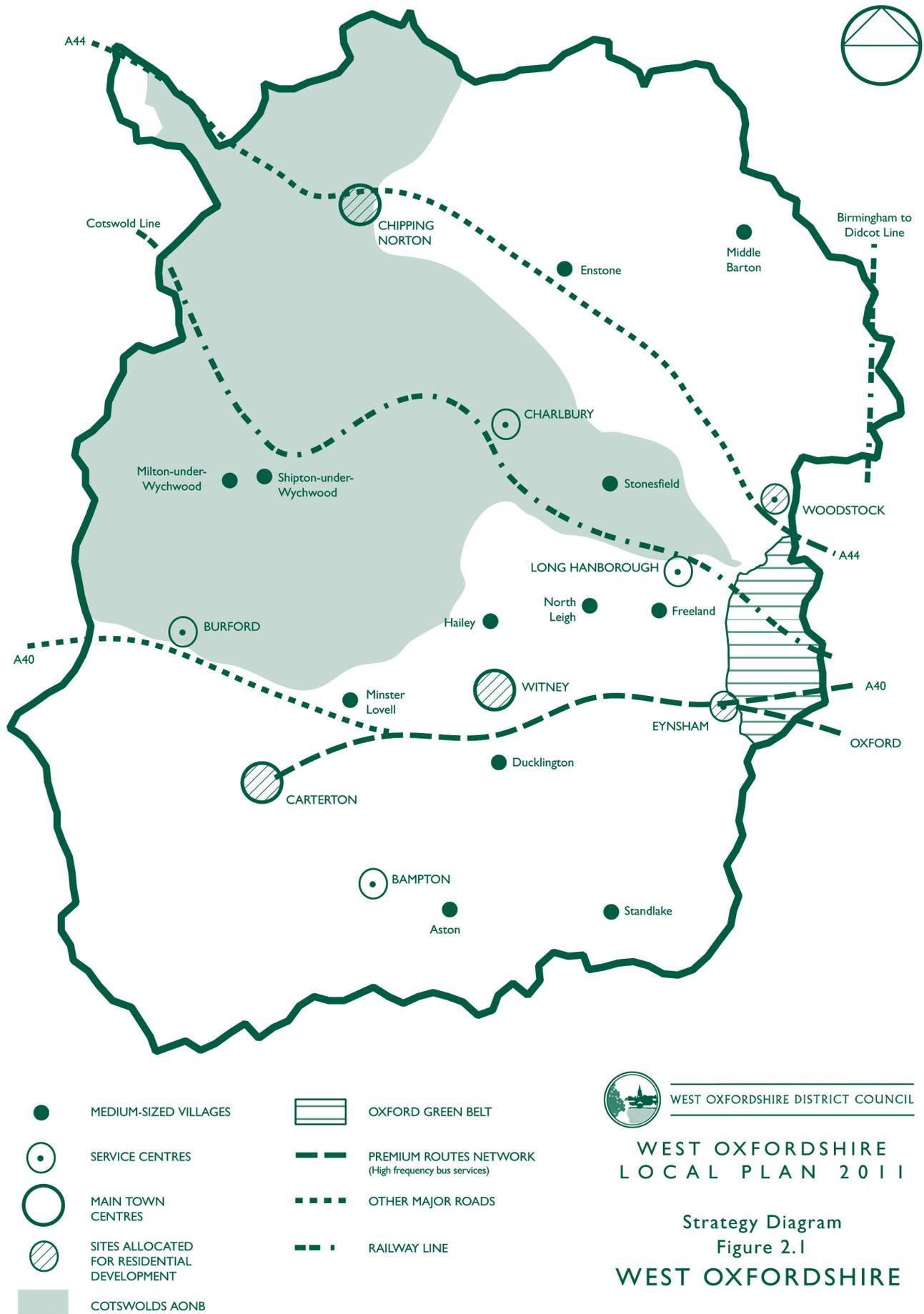
West Oxfordshire – the local strategy

2.16 West Oxfordshire is a very attractive mainly rural area where pressures for development are high. The main feature of the overall strategy for the District during the years up to 2011 is to continue to concentrate as much of the new development as possible in or on the edge of the larger settlements. Apart from major growth of Witney in accordance with the Oxfordshire Structure Plan, new land releases for housing, employment and supporting facilities are specifically proposed at Carterton, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Woodstock, important service centres in the District. A significant proportion of this new residential development will be affordable housing to meet the needs of local people who are unable to afford to purchase or rent at market prices. Meeting local housing needs is a key issue determining the location of new housing.

2.17 This approach of concentration locates new housing and jobs where there is (or can be provided) good access, by a choice of transport, to a wide range of services and facilities. This should however be seen in the context of a rural District where a large percentage of the population will have little alternative but to use the car for journeys to work, shop, school, etc.

2.18 Concentration of development in a few locations also provides the best opportunity of securing necessary supporting infrastructure and services at economic cost, funded wholly or in part by the development itself. The policies and site specific proposals in the Plan set out the requirements to be met before planning permission will be granted for certain developments.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2011

Strategy Diagram
Figure 2.1
WEST OXFORDSHIRE

General Strategy

- 2.19 Outside the areas specifically allocated for development, further new development will be strictly limited. Particular emphasis will be placed on the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs and encouragement of small scale employment opportunities, particularly through the use of existing buildings and farm diversification. West Oxfordshire currently benefits from a healthy local economy and this Plan seeks to maintain that situation without stimulating unacceptable levels of growth.
- 2.20 In addition to site specific proposals in the Plan, new small-scale housing and employment development will be guided by locational policies. These are linked to a settlement hierarchy which takes into account the size, location and character of each settlement and its range of services and facilities.
- 2.21 Separate policies for each group within the settlement hierarchy define the level and type of development that will be allowed. The aim is to strictly control development in the smaller villages and in the open countryside. Other policies positively promote appropriate improvements to community, recreational and other services in all villages and towns.
- 2.22 New development for leisure and tourism purposes will generally follow the principles of sustainable development and be in scale with and sympathetic to the intrinsic qualities of the surrounding environment. The benefits of tourism to the local economy are carefully balanced with the need to minimise any adverse effects on the environment.
- 2.23 Policies in this Plan seek all new development to be well-designed and to respect its surroundings. The historic environment will be carefully conserved. Development of sites specifically allocated in this Plan will be designed and implemented in such a way that they make a positive contribution to the quality of the built environment and its landscape setting.
- 2.24 The rich diversity and character of the component parts of West Oxfordshire is recognised in the landscape policy approach. All of the District, whether within the nationally designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or not, has its own landscape value and development sensitivities. This approach is supplemented by buffer area policies for land adjoining Witney and Carterton that is subject to particular pressure from coalescence or urban sprawl.
- 2.25 Concentration of new development in the larger settlements also helps to protect the rural character of the wider countryside. Protection of existing landscape features and habitats of ecological value, together with creation of new wildlife areas and increased woodland cover, is an important part of the overall strategy to conserve the wider natural environment and, in particular, its biodiversity.

APPRAISAL OF THE PLAN

2.26 Local authorities are expected to carry out a full environmental appraisal of their development plan. An on-going appraisal has been undertaken of this Review Plan, with the process described in a separately published document. This appraisal not only assesses the environmental implications of the Plan's objectives, policies and proposals, but widens the scope to encompass all four sustainable development objectives set by the Government.

2.27 Options for the location of new development, particularly housing, have been tested against sustainable criteria, taking into account the provisions of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. Initial public consultation was undertaken on three options for the location of new housing in the District outside Witney – limited dispersal, concentration in a few of the larger settlements or concentration close to the main public transport services. Consultation for Witney investigated potential directions of growth and the factors to be taken into account. Consultation for both Witney and the rural areas sought to identify the main criteria to be used for selecting new housing sites.

2.28 The response received to consultation with technical bodies, local groups and the general public helped inform the Council's decisions on the Review Plan in conjunction with a wide range of survey and monitoring information also published separately. This background information on the environmental stock and characteristics of West Oxfordshire, together with the assessment of development options, includes:

- West Oxfordshire Landscape Appraisal
- Ecological Audit of West Oxfordshire
- Landscape and Ecological Assessments – Witney
- Witney Transport Evaluation
- Expansion of Witney – Which Way?
- Urban Capacity Studies
- Assessment of each settlement in the District in terms of meeting PPG13 (Transport) objective

- Availability of necessary supporting services in the rural areas
- Assessment of journey to work patterns for a variety of employment sites
- Characteristics of occupants of new market and social housing
- Parish appraisals

IMPLEMENTATION

2.29 A fundamental purpose of the Local Plan is to secure implementation of its proposals in a co-ordinated and comprehensive manner. The private sector will be the main agency for funding and implementing change in West Oxfordshire. Whenever appropriate the Plan requires development to finance the provision of infrastructure and services, as well as environmental benefits necessitated by that development. The developer, local authority or other body may carry out implementation once funds have been secured.

2.30 Additional funds to address other deficiencies in infrastructure and services or to secure environmental improvements may be identified from the public purse, either from national or local budgets, but amounts are likely to remain less than required. It is nevertheless hoped that proposals submitted to Government through the Local Transport Plan will secure funding to enable the necessary improvements to be made to the local transport infrastructure.

2.31 The Council has a role as both enabler and provider. It may co-ordinate the provision of proposals with the various bodies involved and may sometimes provide financial assistance. The provision of affordable housing is a key area where the Council acts as enabler. For other proposals the Council may act as the main implementing body such as the provision of new District-wide leisure facilities or a new public car park.

MONITORING OF THE PLAN'S POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

2.32 The Council continues to monitor the effectiveness of the Local Plan policies and proposals. There are three key areas on which monitoring is concentrated – the environment, housing and employment. Information on the following factors will be used to assess the effectiveness of policies and proposals:

Changes to the Quality of the Natural and Built Environment:

- The stock of historic buildings and remains
- Changes to natural features such as tree cover and hedgerows
- Change in biodiversity e.g. through monitoring of specific targets in the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan

Housing:

- Planning permissions and completions, e.g. rates of activity, types and mix of housing, residential densities, location and use of previously developed land
- Appeal decisions
- Surveys of householders on major new developments
- Housing need surveys

Employment:

- Planning permissions and completions, e.g. rates of activity and types of firms
- Vacant industrial and commercial buildings and land
- Unemployment statistics
- Journey to work patterns

2.33 Since 1977 the Council has also kept under review changes in parish facilities in rural areas. Information is provided by Parish Councils.

2.34 As the District Council is not the highway or transportation authority, monitoring of transport matters will be generally the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council.

However, as responsibility for off-street parking is a District Council function, monitoring of the capacity and duration of parking is carried out for the main town centre car parks on a regular basis.

2.35 Information gained from this on-going monitoring will be used in conjunction with data provided by other organisations such as population forecasts.