

Chapter 1

Oxfordshire: Ambitions and Objectives

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces Oxfordshire and outlines Oxfordshire County Council's ambitions and objectives. It also outlines the Council's longer-term Local Transport Strategy and introduces the objectives of this Local Transport Plan.

Introduction

Oxfordshire is a vibrant county in the heart of England where a thriving economy is able to blend successfully with a high quality environment:

- > Oxford is famous the world over as a seat of learning but today the county's fame stretches beyond academic excellence to the pivotal role it plays in international publishing, bio-technology, car manufacture and motorsport. The county has consistently low unemployment and is one of Europe's most prosperous areas.
- > Oxfordshire is South-East England's most rural county with over two-thirds of its area devoted to agriculture and almost 75% of the county designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Area of High Landscape Value or Green Belt.

Printing & publishing, education, health and high-tech industries are particularly important to the Oxfordshire economy. One in five employees in Oxford City work in the education sector. Oxfordshire has the largest concentration of printing and publishing companies in the UK outside London. Oxfordshire is also at the heart of 'Motorsport Valley', a globally significant site of motorsport production.

Over three quarters of firms employ less than ten people, although a third of all employees in Oxfordshire work for the 1% of organisations with over 200 employees. Oxford has the greatest number of large employers, West Oxfordshire the least. Many of Oxfordshire's largest employers are in the public sector.

Population Statistics

Oxfordshire's population in 2001 was 605,500. Of this 54% lived in the 10 towns which had a population of more than 10,000 people:

Oxford	134,000
Banbury	42,000
Abingdon	30,500
Bicester	28,500
Witney	23,000
Didcot	23,000
Kidlington	13,500
Carterton	12,000
Thame	11,000
Henley-on-Thames	11,000

In addition, a further 8% lived in the 7 settlements with a population between 5,000 and 10,000:

Wantage	10,000
Grove	8,000
Wallingford	6,500
Great Faringdon	6,000
Chipping Norton	6,000
Chinnor	6,000
Cumnor	5,500

Oxfordshire is divided into five local authority areas - Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire. Their populations in 2001 were as follows:

> Cherwell	132,000
> Oxford City	134,000
> South Oxfordshire	128,000
> Vale of White Horse	116,000
> West Oxfordshire	95,500

Oxfordshire has a highly qualified workforce and unemployment is low, although there are pockets of higher unemployment which coincide with areas of low skills. Oxfordshire has an above average proportion of higher and intermediate managerial/administrative/professionals yet average earnings for full-time workers are lower than those for the South East as a whole.

Although generally prosperous, there are thirteen areas in Oxfordshire in the top 20% of most deprived in the country:

- > Northfield Brook, Oxford (2 areas)
- > Rose Hill and Iffley, Oxford (2 areas)
- > Barton & Sandhills, Oxford (2 areas)
- > Ruscote, Banbury (3 areas)
- > Blackbird Leys, Oxford (3 areas)

- > Carfax, Oxford (1 areas)

Generally though, Oxfordshire has generally low levels of deprivation. On a nationwide district-by-district ranking basis (out of 354, where 1 is the most deprived) the results for Oxfordshire in 2004 were:

> Cherwell	274
> Oxford City	144
> South Oxfordshire	332
> Vale of White Horse	339
> West Oxfordshire	347

The standard of health of the people in Oxfordshire is generally good; life expectancy is higher than the average for the Thames Valley and England as a whole. Violent crime and burglary levels are both substantially below the national average. The average house price in Oxfordshire has almost doubled since the start of 1999. House prices are highest in parts of South Oxfordshire, and lowest in the country towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney. Wages have not risen at the same rate, and the average price of a semi-detached house in Oxfordshire is now 7.5 times the average wage.

The proposed modification to the Deposit Draft Structure Plan 2016 (May 2005) proposes that provision should be made for 37,300 additional dwellings (net) between 2001 and 2016. This would be distributed between the districts as follows:

> Cherwell	9,350
> Oxford City	6,500
> South Oxfordshire	7,500
> Vale of White Horse	7,150
> West Oxfordshire	6,800
> Total	37,300

The main locations for this new housing will be within Oxford (about 6,500 dwellings), Banbury (about 3,700 dwellings), Bicester (about 3,300 dwellings), Didcot (about 4,500 dwellings), Witney (about 3,000 dwellings) and Grove (about 2,100 dwellings). In the main towns an appropriate provision will be made for employment development to achieve a balance between the number and types of jobs and the size and skills of the workforce and to support the development of science-based or other important business clusters.

The precise locations and form of the development will be decided in the relevant local plans or local development frameworks. The Structure Plan requires that developments are only permitted if they provide for the mitigation of any adverse transport impacts that they cause. This policy has proved difficult to enforce in the past with the consequence that the County

Council has been required to provide completion funding for a number of schemes which had been identified as being funded through developer contributions.

County Aims and Objectives

Oxfordshire faces considerable challenges in the future - additional housing allocations being chief amongst them. This will place demands on most, if not all, of the county's resources - including transport. Managing this additional demand while protecting Oxfordshire's environment and economy forms the central challenge for this Local Transport Plan. Transport itself is another of these challenges, enabling the economy and population to continue to grow without unsustainable impacts on the physical environment on which they depend, and in a way which helps those most excluded.

The Aim of Oxfordshire County Council, as set out in the *Oxfordshire Plan*, is to:

Improve the Quality of Life in Oxfordshire, by:

- > Helping people to fulfil their potential
- > Protecting our environment
- > Safeguarding our communities
- > Sustaining our prosperity
- > Raising our performance

The Council acts with others in the Oxfordshire Community Partnership to help deliver an even broader vision for the county.

This Local Transport Plan is a fundamental part of our Council-wide approach for turning the Council's Aim into practical action. It provides a five-year programme for 2006-11, within a Transport Strategy stretching at least 10 years beyond that.

The Plan helps *people fulfil their potential* by improving their access to work and leisure and helping make them self dependant, even where frail or disabled.

It helps *protect our environment* by improving air quality and the visual street environment.

It helps *safeguard our communities* by enabling people to travel more safely and also by helping residents feel less threatened by passing traffic.

It helps *sustain our prosperity* by enabling goods to access markets, people to access jobs and shops and by reducing wasted time from congestion.

It helps *raise our performance* by enabling the County Council to achieve better outcomes for its customers, use more efficient processes and partnerships, make better use of its assets and reduce casualties.

To provide focus, the Local Transport Strategy and Plan have their own supporting Aim and Objective. The Aim is:

To improve access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need, in ways which are both safe and sustainable.

The Objectives are:

- > Tackling congestion
- > Delivering accessibility
- > Safer roads
- > Better air quality
- > Improving the street environment.

Everything in the Plan is directed towards meeting these objectives, and ultimately the success of the Plan will be judged in terms of how well these objectives have been met.

Oxfordshire's Long-Term Transport Strategy

Policy Context

The Strategy addresses the emerging spatial planning policies and therefore has a time horizon of 2026 to complement the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East.

The Strategy has been developed to understand existing network provision and future transport requirements in relation to:

- > Proposed locations for housing growth in Oxfordshire and neighbouring authorities;
- > Locations for potential major employment growth;
- > Oxford's further growth as a regional hub (being a key destination for employment, healthcare, leisure, tourism and shopping);
- > Existing demand for travel and future changes likely over time;
- > Key constraints on the transport networks now and in the future; and
- > Understanding stakeholder and public issues and aspirations through a variety of methods of consultation and participation.

Key Transport Issues

As part of the development of the Strategy, a multi-modal transport model was developed to assess the likely demand for travel in the longer term. This took account of national and local policies and trends including development proposals emerging in the draft South East Plan

Growth in all traffic in Oxfordshire is expected to be over 25% - well above the national average of 18%. This is partly as a result of higher than average population growth and goods vehicle forecasts. A comparison of average hour traffic flows entering and leaving the county and towns in the county has shown that:

Key Fact

If nothing is done, the number of trips in the county could increase by more than 25% by 2011 and almost 40% by 2021 from a 2000 base.

- > Traffic flows across the county boundary will increase by 20% in the north, 26% in the south, 36% in the east and 28% in the west; and
- > Traffic flows across the town 'screenlines' will increase by 20% at Banbury, 24% at Bicester, 30% at Chipping Norton, 22% at Oxford; 28% at Thame and 29% at Wantage.

The predicted increases in traffic vary considerably by location. In general, those routes that are currently closest to capacity experience lower than average percentage increases, due to their limited scope for accommodating additional traffic. If a 'do minimum' approach is adopted it is expected that this will lead to large percentage increases on alternative routes, including a number of B-class and unclassified roads. In many of these cases the existing flow levels are low, and there would be capacity available to absorb the increases, but clearly there could be consequences in terms of safety and environmental impacts.

The overall impact of these changes, if they occurred, would be:

- > Severe congestion on major routes causing unreliable journey times, increased delays and diversion of traffic onto more minor routes - such congestion would also add to bus journey times and increase the costs of moving goods to and through the county;
- > Lengthening of traffic "peak" hours;
- > Increased levels of noise, vibration and townscape/landscape impact, especially on more minor routes, with a potentially significant quality of life impact;
- > Overcrowding on railways unless more seating capacity is provided through the use of longer trains, in the short term, and the provision of extra track capacity in the longer term; and

- > Travelling by foot or by cycle would be likely to be less popular due to increased traffic flows.

The scale of the problems requires a clearly defined longer term strategy.

The Strategy

The car is and will continue to be the predominant mode of travel. The County Council therefore wants to improve the reliability and safety of car trips by tackling key congestion 'hotspots'. In all areas of Oxfordshire the County Council also needs to cater for the significant minority who do not have car access so they are able to reach services and employment. This Strategy is therefore a balanced package to achieve all of these things. It is aimed at tackling problems and the solutions will vary according to the prevailing circumstances. The study also found that in order to address the objectives the Strategy would need to provide a combination of highway (roads and routing) and public transport improvements alongside a package of measures to influence travel behaviour.

Roads and Routeing

The following criteria determined the need for road and routeing improvements:

- > The primary focus for road improvements should be where it addresses environmental impacts of traffic, in particular where major routes pass through villages and affect overall quality of life. The whole A and B-road network in the county has been examined in order to assess the 'baseline' situation in this respect;
- > A range of traffic management measures is to be considered to deal with identified problems before considering new roads or increasing capacity on the existing network;
- > Where traffic management measures are not sufficient to address problems, consideration can be given to improvements such as bypass schemes. The case for these has been prioritised in terms of the scale of environmental problems arising (e.g. in terms of route layout and proximity to buildings), levels of congestion, numbers of HGVs and predicted traffic increases in future. In addition, any wider impacts that an improvement may cause have been identified, so that routes are considered as a whole. The environmental implications of building a relief scheme have also been taken into account;
- > It is not recommended to provide route improvements (such as bypasses or widening) for capacity reasons alone. However, where severe capacity problems exist at certain 'bottleneck' locations, improvement measures have been considered (again taking account of potential wider impacts), with the aim of ensuring that benefits for public transport are 'locked in'.

Public Transport

Public transport improvements are at the heart of the Long-term Transport Strategy. The promotion of the bus network as a whole is key to the overall Strategy including the need to achieve high overall standards of vehicles, and information as well as bus priority measures. As part of the bus network proposals, a focus will also be placed on providing good links to rail stations in parts of the County where these are lacking, thus helping to widen access to the rail network. The aim has been to ensure that all significant towns in Oxfordshire are served by public transport.

Under the current regulatory system it is difficult for the County Council to take full control over these issues, but particularly in the more rural areas the County Council may seek quality contract-type arrangements. In relation to the commercial services, it will be necessary to reach agreements with operators, and again the County Council will seek to achieve this on a formal basis as far as is practical.

A Premium Routes network with services of at least a 15 minute frequency will be provided by:

- > Promoting high quality public transport on the most heavily travelled corridors in the county;
- > Working with operators to improve punctuality and reduce boarding times;
- > Giving priority to buses at locations where congestion is experienced;
- > Within Oxford, giving further consideration to achieving stronger priority between the Park & Ride sites and central Oxford; and
- > Considering Remote Park & Ride sites to serve key travel movements.

A 'second tier' (frequency 30 - 60 minutes) and 'feeder' services which would be defined by considering:

- > Direct journeys by bus off the premium routes network (rather than requiring users to change services). Having a denser network of direct routes should also enable feeder services to have more extensive coverage;
- > Improvements to the network where there would be strong accessibility and social inclusion benefits in providing an enhanced public transport network, particularly in the more rural areas; and
- > Locations for rural bus hubs, where passengers would change onto another bus or simply to access services in that town or village.

The County Council's main priorities for rail improvement are:

- > Implementation of 'East-West Rail' (initially from Oxford to Bletchley);
- > An enhanced Oxford Station to improve the capacity of the interchange and help with the regeneration of the city's West End;

- > Improvements to the Cotswold Line, focusing initially on the principal stations; and
- > As a minimum, to maintain existing service levels, particularly to major centres where housing growth is proposed.

Influencing Travel Behaviour

Measures aimed at influencing travel habits form an important part of the overall strategy. The Strategy includes the following:

- > Use of Intelligent Transport Systems;
- > Encourage further introduction and promotion of travel plans for employment developments and schools;
- > Better provision of information for all sustainable modes of travel to assist in encouraging more sustainable travel choices
- > Parking controls and pricing mechanisms;
- > More co-ordination between development planning and transport planning, to ensure that infrastructure requirements are planned for in advance of proposed development;
- > More 'joined-up thinking' internally in terms of the impact of decisions by the County Council and others on transport, for example covering areas such as education and healthcare provision. This is likely to be one of the most important ways to try to address the underlying trend of increasing demand for travel. A key tool will be the preparation of a "sustainability audit" of all the County Council's policies in terms of transport impacts;
- > More partnership working externally, in areas where the County Council does not have direct control itself, such as healthcare, achieving consensus on policy decisions that impact on transport, may again be difficult, but it is important to take steps to try to influence key decisions; and
- > Encourage car sharing through travel plans, car clubs, provision of highway measures to give priority to car sharing vehicles and park and share facilities.

Local Transport Plan Objectives

Consultation carried out during the development of this Plan has confirmed that the four priority areas, agreed between the Government and Local Government Association, for transport (congestion, accessibility, road safety and air quality) are the right ones for Oxfordshire and are consistent with the County Council's Long-term Transport Strategy. In addition, we have identified the improvement of the street environment, as a further priority to improve the quality of life for all.

These priorities will be at the heart of the County Council's transport strategy for the next five years. The objectives for this Plan are therefore:

Tackling Congestion

Traffic jams cause delays which cost people and businesses time and money. Congestion can also result in poor air quality and often makes bus services less reliable.

Delivering Accessibility

Accessing jobs and services is fundamental to a good quality of life. The availability of public transport and good walking and cycling routes is essential to minimising the risk of social exclusion, particularly for people without access to a car. Appropriate and accessible public transport is fundamental to improving quality of life.

Safer Roads

In 2004, 33 people were killed and over 300 seriously injured as a result of road accidents in Oxfordshire. Nationally, road accidents are the single biggest killer of school age children. Safer roads are therefore essential in helping to safeguard our communities.

Better Air Quality

Although the quality of Oxfordshire's air is generally very good, there are some locations where traffic related air pollution exceeds recommended levels. Targeted action to address air quality problems will improve overall health for those affected.

Improving the Street Environment

Streets that are dominated by traffic or poorly designed can be unpleasant to spend time in, particularly for pedestrians. A high-quality street environment, on the other hand, can add to the vitality of a street, attracting visitors, boosting business and creating a pleasant public space for people to enjoy. Poorly designed streets can be dangerous to everyone particularly parents with pushchairs, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.