



STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

HOW THE PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDERS WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OXFORDSHIRE PLAN

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Produced by



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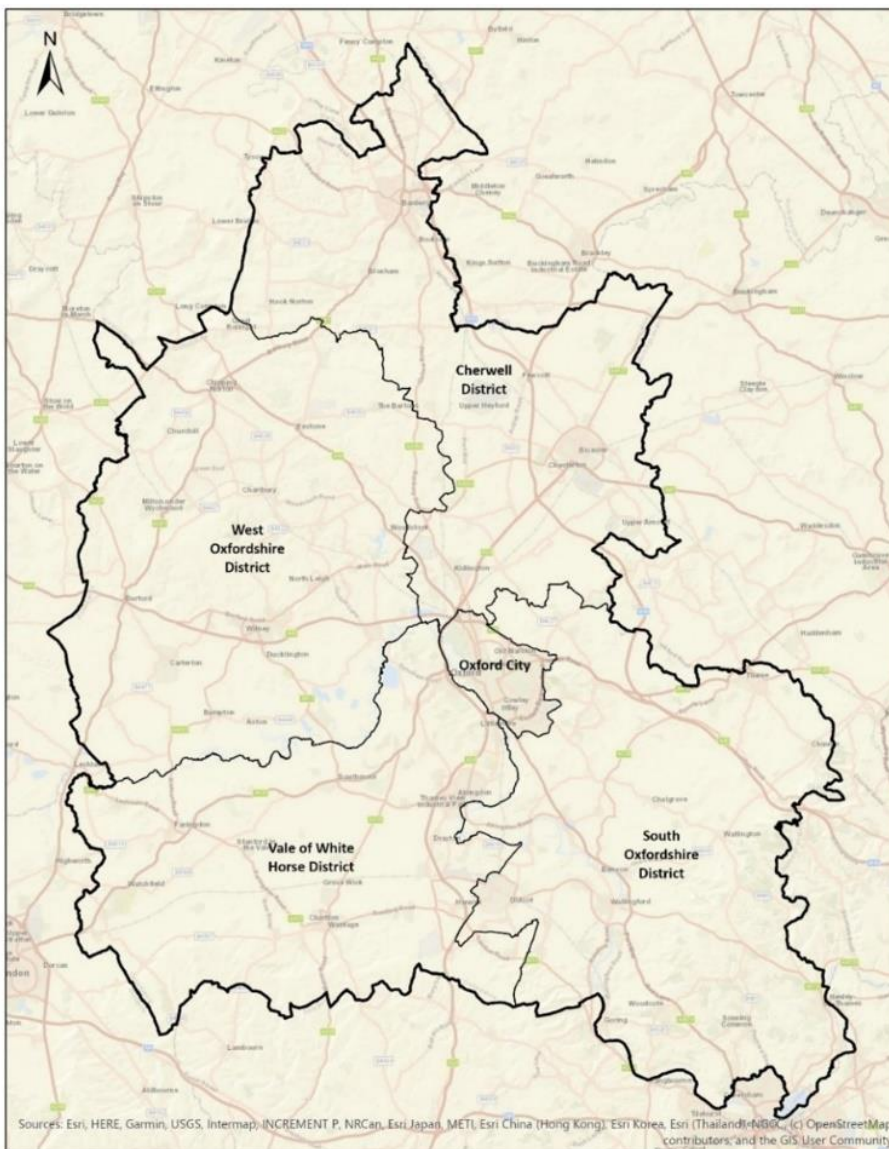
1 Introduction

1.1 This statement sets out how people and organisations can get involved in shaping the future of Oxfordshire. It updates and replaces the previous Statement of Community Involvement, published in June 2021.

1.2 This update provides the latest information on the progress of the Oxfordshire Plan, including how community and stakeholder engagement will operate. It has also been updated in response to the recent lifting of coronavirus restrictions. It explains the consultation methods that will be used at different points in the preparation of this plan to ensure effective community and stakeholder engagement from the outset.

1.3 The Oxfordshire Plan is a joint statutory plan and covers the authorities of Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council (as defined in figure 1).

Figure 1: Oxfordshire authority boundaries



1.4 Recent changes to government legislation (following the lifting of the coronavirus restrictions) and the increased use of digital engagement tools (e.g. social media platforms) mean that this statement needs to be updated.

1.5 This statement sets out Oxfordshire’s approach to the effective engagement of people and organisations during the production of the Oxfordshire Plan. Early and meaningful engagement will help to ensure that planning policies in the emerging plan reflect the needs, aspirations and concerns of residents and businesses across Oxfordshire. It also explains:

- how consultation and engagement on the Oxfordshire Plan will take place;
- who will be consulted and when; and
- how future consultation stages will be monitored to ensure they remain effective and meaningful.

1.6 Community engagement lies at the heart of good planning in Oxfordshire. In Oxfordshire, good planning will make a significant and positive difference to the lives of residents and businesses and help deliver the new homes, jobs, services we need and safeguard the environmental assets we value. By preparing this plan, the public and stakeholders will have the opportunity to share their ideas and feedback on the future planning of Oxfordshire, including the future role of Oxfordshire’s settlements.

1.7 The Oxfordshire Plan will be prepared in line with the procedures and processes set out in this statement¹.

1.8 We hope that you find this statement clear and easy to read. Technical terms are defined in the text or the glossary (see appendix 1). All the most up-to-date information on the emerging plan is available from our website at <https://oxfordshireplan.org>.

2. Background

2.1 Local authorities in Oxfordshire have agreed a housing and growth deal with the government to plan and support the delivery of significant new affordable homes and major infrastructure investment in response to the growing needs of the population. This deal includes a commitment to produce a joint statutory spatial plan (known as the “Oxfordshire Plan”) to guide the future planning of the county up to 2050.

2.2 The Oxfordshire Plan will provide a positive, high-level planning framework to guide the delivery of new homes, economic development and associated infrastructure across the county, with a bold ambition to confront our climate crisis, build a fairer and more prosperous economy, foster more thriving and accessible neighbourhoods and support a truly green recovery that protects the future of our environment and wildlife. Specifically, it will outline:

- a shared vision of how the county will develop and change over the next 25-30 years, based on the shared priorities of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership²;
- the broad pattern, scale and quality of new development (including the provision of affordable homes, employment and supporting infrastructure) that will come forward across the whole of Oxfordshire, and how it will be apportioned to the city and districts;
- a series of theme-based policies to guide and inform planning decisions at the strategic level, including the preparation and implementation of Local Plan reviews and major planning applications; and
- approach to delivery and implementation, including review triggers, monitoring targets, phasing timescales and funding mechanisms.

2.3 Once adopted, the Oxfordshire Plan will form part of the development plan of each authority in

¹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

² The Future Oxfordshire Partnership has developed a long-term strategic vision on the future of Oxfordshire up to 2050, in consultation with key strategic partners and the wider public, which will inform the development of other plans and wider strategies, including the Oxfordshire Plan (see <https://futureoxfordshirepartnership.org>).

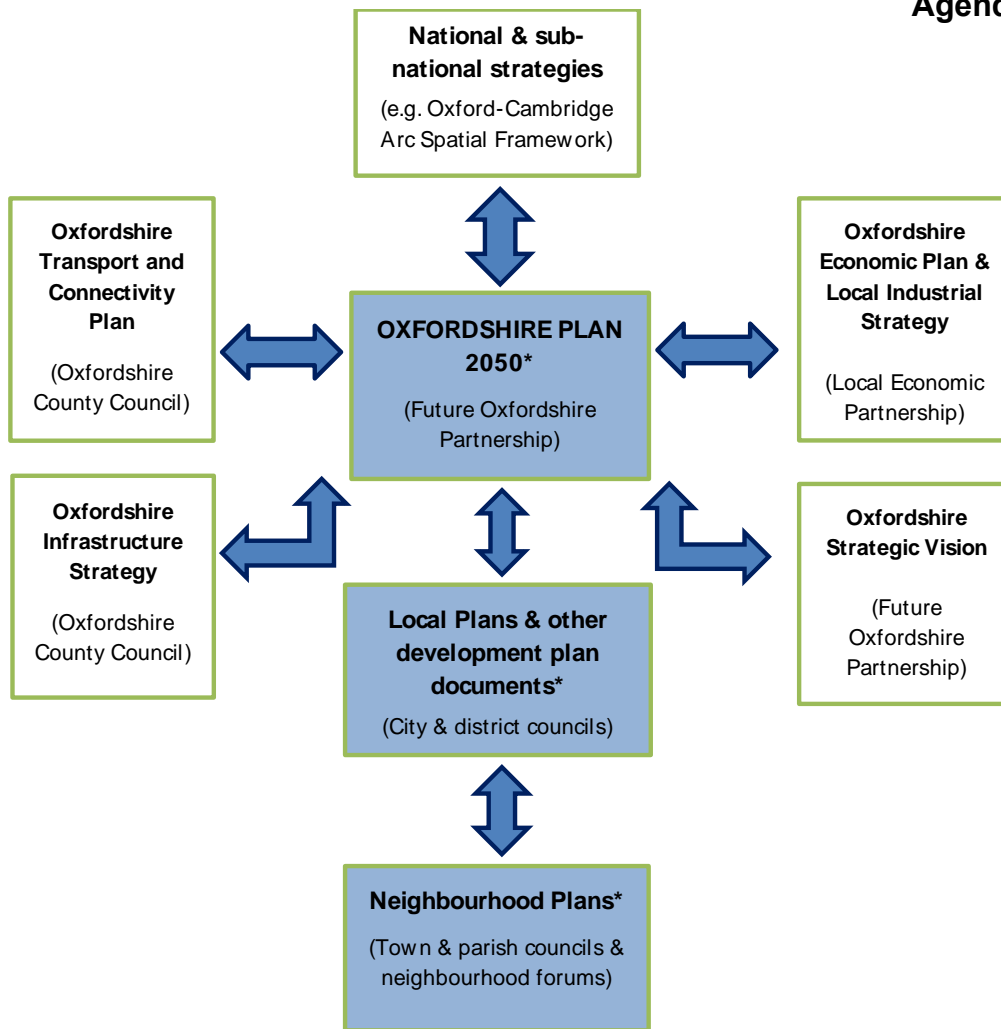
Oxfordshire³.

2.4 Figure 2 overleaf shows the relationship between the Oxfordshire Plan and other relevant plans and strategies, such as Local Plans. The Oxfordshire Plan will build on the current suite of adopted Local Plans (up to 2031/2036) and look ahead to align with the long-term priorities of county-wide strategies, such as the Local Industrial Strategy, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and Oxfordshire Transport and Connectivity Plan, up until 2050. It will also sit alongside the high-level policies expected to be set out in the government's emerging Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Development Framework.

2.5 The Oxfordshire Plan will, in turn, inform and guide the review and roll-forward of city and district Local Plans and other development plan documents (e.g. area action plans), where appropriate. Local Plan reviews will need to align with the policies set out in the Oxfordshire Plan.

Figure 2: Relationship between the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and other relevant plans and strategies

³ Oxfordshire's development plan consists of the Oxfordshire Plan, Local Plans (plus any supporting development plan documents, such as area action plans, where appropriate) and Neighbourhood Plans. Future planning decisions will be determined in accordance with the development plan unless other relevant considerations need to be taken into account (section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 - as amended).



*Statutory documents which form part of Oxfordshire’s development plan

3. How the public and stakeholders will be involved in the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan

3.1 As presented in figure 3, the Oxfordshire Plan involves different stages of preparation, which require public consultation and engagement. This statement sets out how these requirements will be met.

3.2 The Oxfordshire Plan must also be prepared in line with other specific legal and procedural requirements. A sustainability appraisal will be undertaken at each stage of preparation to evaluate the social, economic and environmental impacts of the plan policies and alternative options (as per the regulations⁴). In doing so, it will ensure that the plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Specific consultation bodies (Environment Agency, Heritage England and Natural England) will need to be notified on the scope and content of the sustainability appraisal alongside the preparation of the plan. These policies will also be assessed in terms of their potential impact on:

- different groups of people (as per the Equality Act); and
- the integrity of internationally designated nature conservation sites (as per the Habitat Regulations).

3.3 Comments will be invited on the findings of the sustainability appraisal and other supporting documents at each stage of public consultation.

3.4 The Oxfordshire Plan will also need to be prepared in accordance with the duty to co-operate set out in legislation⁵. It places a legal duty on local authorities to co-operate with neighbouring districts, boroughs

⁴ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

⁵ Localism Act 2011

and counties, as well as other organisations including the local primary care trust and transport authorities on an ongoing and collaborative basis, particularly in the context of strategic cross-boundary matters. Oxfordshire authorities are working together under the duty to co-operate to progress the Oxfordshire Plan through to adoption.

4. Who will be engaged during the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan?

4.1 A wide range of groups, organisations and individuals will be invited to participate in the plan preparation process. These include specific and general consultation bodies (as defined in the regulations).

4.2 Specific consultation bodies include:

- statutory consultees as set out in the relevant regulations, including neighbouring councils and government agencies, such as Highways England, Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England;
- town and parish councils;
- neighbouring authorities; and
- local service providers (including the emergency services, utility companies and public health providers)

4.3 General consultation bodies must be consulted at key stages of the plan process where the proposed subject matter will be of interest to them. These include:

- national and regional organisations, such as the National Trust and wildlife trusts;
- businesses and economic groups including the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, universities and colleges;
- housebuilders, developers, landowners and housing associations;
- local organisations and societies, such as civic amenity groups and community boards
- hard-to-reach groups, such as young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and gypsy and travelers; and
- residents and individuals, who may have an interest in the Oxfordshire Plan

5. How do we consult?

5.1 A range of different methods will be used at each stage of the plan process to inform, consult and engage with the public and interested parties, depending on the nature of the consultation and the specific needs of the audience or target group. This will involve:

- updating the web pages to include relevant links to documents and post latest news;
- producing consultation documents and materials that are clear, concise and avoid unnecessary technical language, as far as possible, without understating the complexities of any issues or decisions;
- preparing press releases and advertising in the local press;
- holding engagement events, such as exhibitions and briefings, face-to-face or online, where reasonably practicable;
- making consultation documents available upon request, in other languages, large print, braille and audio;
- preparing visual aides (e.g. presentations) that are accessible to blind people, people with impaired hearing and people with mental health issues or learning difficulties;
- preparing response forms/survey forms to facilitate responses to the consultation;
- producing a glossary explaining the technical and planning terms used in the plan;

- using high-quality visuals and graphics to enhance the text and illustrate key points from the plan, where appropriate;
- preparing leaflets/newsletters summarising the purpose of the consultation and how to make comments; and
- maintaining an up-to-date consultation database containing specific and general consultees and others that have expressed an interest to be consulted on the plan, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations. Where consultation is required, all those on the consultation database will be notified. When individual or organisations makes a representation on the Oxfordshire Plan or its supporting documentation, they will be added to the consultation database.

5.2 Where appropriate, we may use panels or reference groups as part of future public engagements as well as undertake additional research, such as an opinion poll.

5.3 We want everyone to have an opportunity to shape and influence how Oxfordshire is planned and developed in the future, irrespective of their differences, including by way of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, employment status, social background and sexual orientation. Consultation events and meetings will be carefully planned to maximise accessibility to a range of stakeholders and individuals, from different parts of Oxfordshire, at a range of times (subject to meeting covid-19 guidelines). Hard copies of the consultation documents can also be printed on request (subject to a small fee to cover costs).

5.4 All consultation documents and relevant evidence will be made available online (via the Oxfordshire Plan web site). Where requested, consultation documents will be made available in other languages or formats (e.g. braille, large print and sign language), as appropriate.

5.5 We will ensure that personal data gathered within public consultation processes will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and the Data Protection Act 2018, in terms of how it is collected and managed.

5.6 We will also raise awareness of the publication of documents and public consultations via our website, social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), an email to those on our mailing list and through a press release sent to local media. It may be possible due to changes in covid-19 advice to reinstate hard copies of the plan and relevant consultation documents at deposit locations (all libraries and council offices in Oxfordshire).

5.7 Additional days will be added to public consultation periods where statutory public holidays fall within the formal consultation period.

5.8 Some public events, meetings, workshops, exhibitions and focus groups may now be able to take place in person, albeit with possible restrictions⁶. We will also continue to undertake public engagement virtually, using online meeting systems, web pages and social media, in the interests of public health and ease of access. For the latest information on the plan, please see the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website at <https://oxfordshireplan.org>.

6. How to comment on the Oxfordshire Plan?

6.1 As set out in previous statements, stakeholders and members of the public can respond to public consultations on the Oxfordshire Plan in one of the following ways:

- Online (via the Oxfordshire Plan website at <https://oxfordshireplan.org>).
- Email: info@oxfordshireplan.org

- Post: Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Plan 2050, County Hall, New Road, Oxford, OX1 1ND

6.2 A comments form will be produced at each stage of public consultation. The form will be able to be used through the consultation portal on the web site, or alternatively the form or letters can be emailed or posted to us. Receiving comments through both electronic and handwritten formats will ensure those without internet access will not be disadvantaged in terms of engagement.

6.3 We would encourage people and organisations to make use of the “Oxfordshire Plan 2050” website, which will set out the information we are seeking at each consultation stage, together with clear instructions on how to register comments. Online engagement will be the easiest way to respond to public consultations and will allow us to quickly consider your comments on the plan.

6.4 All comments received in response to a public consultation will be considered. A consultation report summarising comments and our responses to the issues raised will be made available on the Oxfordshire Plan website.

7. When we will consult?

7.1 Figure 3 below sets out the stages of plan preparation, including key milestones and extent and nature of the public consultation activities, as well as the role of different organisations and representatives. These stages are as follows:

- Early informal consultation and engagement (regulation 18).
- Formal consultation on draft plan (regulation 19).
- Submission and examination (regulations 22 and 34).
- Adoption (regulation 36).

Figure 3: Stages of preparation

Regulation 18 consultation		
Description of plan stage:		
Regulation 18 is the earliest stage of plan engagement and represents the scoping stage to decide what should be included within the plan. This includes potential policy options and spatial options. Due to the nature of this stage with its ambition to gain a variety of views on what could be included in the plan, multiple consultations can take place, of which two have taken place so far.		
Who was/will be involved?	What were we/are we consulting on?	How did we consult, or how are we consulting?
<i>Informal consultation on the emerging Oxfordshire Plan⁷</i>		
Various bodies/stakeholders are consulted in line with those required under regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012. This includes the general public and other	A report summarising the results of the consultation (including an explanation of how the views from stakeholders have been considered in the development of the plan). Following the consultation, we will update the plan to take account of the responses from stakeholders, the results of the sustainability appraisal and the supporting evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and other interested parties by email • Social media posts • Events/ exhibitions • Press release • Documents available to view in council buildings

interested bodies as appropriate.		
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Publication (regulation 19)		
Description of plan stage:		
Regulation 19 is the second stage of the consultation process and is the stage at which the final draft version of the plan is published. At this stage, representations must relate to the tests relating to how the plan has been prepared (legal compliance) and its content (soundness), as outlined in government guidance. The public consultation represents the last opportunity to influence and help shape the direction of the plan before it is submitted to the secretary of state.		
Who was/will be involved?	What were we/are we consulting on?	How did we consult, or how are we consulting?
<i>Consultation on the submission draft plan</i>		
Various bodies/stakeholders will be consulted in line with those required under regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012. This will include the general public and other interested bodies as appropriate.	We will consult on the draft submission plan over a period of at least six weeks. This will set out the final proposed strategy and policies of the plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and other interested parties by email • Social media posts • In person and/or virtual consultation events with key stakeholders and the public (depending on government regulations at the time of the consultation) • Press release • Documents available to view in libraries and council buildings

Submission and independent examination (regulations 22 and 34)		
Description of plan stage:		
Following the close of the regulation 19 consultation, the Oxfordshire Plan will be submitted alongside the representations received during the regulation 19 consultation and supporting evidence (including the sustainability appraisal) to the secretary of state, who will appoint an inspector to carry out an independent examination.		
Supporting documents will include technical studies, background papers and written summaries of previous public consultations setting out how the issues raised through the publication stage have been addressed in the plan.		
The examination will assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements (e.g. duty to co-operate and public consultation) and meets the test of soundness. The four tests of soundness are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).		
Who was/will be involved?	What were we/are we consulting on?	How did we consult, or how are we consulting?
Issues and matters		
We will notify people/organisations listed in the regulations and others as	The inspector will consider the evidence used to support the plan and any representations which have been put	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and

<p>appropriate via the programme officer about the commencement of the examination.</p>	<p>forward from stakeholders and other interested parties.</p> <p>All documentation associated with the examination will be recorded and made available to the public and stakeholders via the Oxfordshire Plan examination library on our joint website. The examination library will be kept up to date as the examination progresses.</p>	<p>other interested parties by email</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media posts • In person and/or virtual consultation events with key stakeholders and the public (dependent on government regulations at the time of the consultation) • Press release
<p><i>Public hearing sessions</i></p>		
<p>Anyone has the right to attend and speak at hearings if they wish, so long as they have submitted representations on the Oxfordshire Plan during the formal consultation stage (regulation 19) and stated in advance that they wish to attend the hearings.</p>	<p>The planning inspector will hold several public hearing sessions in the form of informal roundtable discussions, where the inspector will probe the key issues and matters relating to the plan and its preparation.</p> <p>Stakeholders and members of the public will be invited to attend and speak at specific hearings at which they wish to discuss the issues raised in their representations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and other relevant stakeholders via email to notify them of the hearings • Press release • Social media posts
<p><i>Consultation on the inspector’s main modifications to the submission plan</i></p>		
<p>We will consult people/organisations listed in the regulations, general public and other interested bodies as appropriate.</p>	<p>As part of this examination process, the inspector will propose changes that they consider necessary to ensure it is 'sound' and legally compliant. These are known as 'main modifications'.</p> <p>All main modifications will be subject to a 6-week period of consultation (see below). The inspector will consider all the representations made before finalising the examination report and the schedule of recommended main modifications.</p> <p>Following the close of the public consultation, we will publish a statement of consultation setting out a summary of the comments made on the main modifications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and other relevant stakeholders by email • Press release • Social media posts

Receipt and publication of the inspector’s report (regulation 35) and subsequent adoption of the plan (regulation 36)

Description of plan stage:

This is the last stage of the preparation process following the public examination, at which the inspector publishes their recommendations on the soundness of the plan in a final report. If the inspector confirms that the plan is sound and legally compliant, we will be able to formally adopt the plan (subject to the ‘main modifications’ identified in the report). In addition, we will be able to make minor, non-material changes (‘additional modifications’) at any time before formal adoption to improve the clarity, consistency and accuracy of the plan.

Who was/will be involved?	What were we/are we consulting on?	How did we consult, or how are we consulting?
<i>Receipt and publication of the inspector's report</i>		
We will notify people/organisations listed in the regulations and others as appropriate via programme officer about the publication of the inspector's report.	<p>At the end of the examination, the planning inspector will publish a report on the submitted plan to the six Oxfordshire authorities recommending whether they can adopt the plan. In most cases, the report will recommend some changes (known as 'main modifications' – see below) that are necessary to allow the plan to be adopted.</p> <p>There is no consultation on the inspector's report, but it will be made available to the public via our website.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website • Contact consultees/organisations and other relevant stakeholders by email • Press release • Social media posts
<i>Adoption</i>		
We will notify people/organisations listed in the regulations and others as appropriate via programme officer about the adoption of the plan.	Once the examination has closed, approval will be sought from the six Oxfordshire authorities to accept the recommendations of the inspector's report and formally adopt the Oxfordshire Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan 2050 website – publish the adoption version of the plan • Press release • Social media posts • Contact organisations and other relevant stakeholders via email • Publish an adoption statement, which will advise of a six-week period within which any challenge via judicial review must be made. • Publish a summary of the Oxfordshire Plan Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment

8. Monitoring and review

8.1 This statement will be kept under regular review and will be updated where necessary to reflect changes to the Oxfordshire Plan timetable and other circumstances, such as the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Appendix 1: Glossary

Term	Acronym	Explanation
Authority Monitoring Report	AMR	Councils are required to produce an authority monitoring report (as set out in section 113 of the 2011 Localism Act) to review the progress and effectiveness of the plan and the extent to which its policies are being achieved.
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	DLUHC	A ministerial department which “supports communities across the UK to thrive, making them great places to live and work” (see www.gov.uk)
Development plan		Councils have a statutory duty (either jointly or individually) to prepare and update development plans across their areas in consultation with the local

		<p>community and stakeholders. The development plan guides future planning decisions and ensures these are rational and consistent, having regard to other material considerations.</p> <p>Oxfordshire’s development plan, once adopted, will include the following documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Plan • Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Plan • Local Plans (city and districts) • Neighbourhood Plans
Duty to co-operate		Councils are required under the Localism Act to work together on a cooperative and ongoing basis to deal with cross-boundary issues, such as public transport, large-scale housing allocations or large employment clusters.
Equalities impact assessment		An assessment of impacts against different characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity and disability) protected under the 2010 Equality Act
Examination		The examination will assess whether the plan meets the tests of soundness (as set out in National Planning Policy Framework) and complies with the regulations.
Future Oxfordshire Partnership	FOP	Joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire (as listed in paragraph 1.3 above) along with the local economic partnership and other key partners. The partnership is overseeing the delivery of the Oxfordshire Plan.
Habitat Regulations Assessment	HRA	An assessment of the potential effects of a plan or programme on the integrity of internationally important nature conservation sites
Local Development Scheme	LDS	A scheduled work programme and timetable to guide the preparation of joint plans or single plans
Localism Act		This act introduced several new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development, including the provision to prepare a ‘neighbourhood plan’ to guide future planning of an area
Local Plans		Local plans are prepared to guide the future planning and development of an area. Work has begun on the review of the adopted local plans in each administrative area. Wherever possible, preparation will be undertaken in parallel with the timetable of the Oxfordshire Plan.
National Planning Policy Framework	NPPF	<p>This document sets out the government’s policies on the planning system in England.</p> <p>Although not part of the development plan, the policies set out in the framework must be considered in the preparation of statutory plans, such as joint plans. The framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development when preparing plans and making planning decisions.</p>
National Planning Practice Guidance	NPPG	National planning guidance which helps explain how the policies in the framework (NPPF) will be applied. Regular updates are published online.
Neighbourhood Plans		A planning document which sets out the vision to guide the future planning of a neighbourhood area, and contains policies relating to the development and use of land in this area. Once adopted, it will have formal status as development plan document and form part of Oxfordshire’s development plan. All neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out in the Oxfordshire Plan / Local Plans.
Oxford-Cambridge Arc		The five counties (Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire) around the line between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. The arc has one of the fastest-growing economies in England. It supports more than 2 million jobs and adds over £110 billion to the economy every year.

Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework		A long-term statutory decision-making framework to guide the future growth of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to 2050. This will inform the preparation of other plans (e.g. Oxfordshire Plan) and strategies across the arc.
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act		National planning legislation from central government aimed at improving the planning process and enhancing community involvement in it. Under section 15 of the act, councils are required to set out current planning policy documents, and any new or replacement documents that it intends to produce in the future, and list them within a local development scheme.
Spatial strategy		The strategy will set out the broad locations where new homes, jobs and services will be provided across Oxfordshire to meet identified needs in line with the overall vision and objectives of the Oxfordshire Plan. Specific proposals will be shown on a key diagram. In this context, preferred means that the strategy is deemed to be the most sustainable and appropriate way of meeting Oxfordshire’s future needs in the light of reasonable alternatives.
Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal		Signed agreement between the government and the six authorities of Oxfordshire / Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership to secure funding towards the delivery of new affordable homes, jobs and infrastructure investment up to 2031 and beyond. The deal committed to prepare a joint statutory plan to guide the future planning of the county up to 2050.
Reasonable alternatives		The different realistic options considered in developing the policies in the Oxfordshire Plan
Statement of Community Involvement	SCI	This document outlines how the community and stakeholders will be involved in the preparation and continuing review of the Oxfordshire Plan.
Strategic Environmental Assessment	SEA	A general term used internationally to describe environmental assessment as applied to policies, plans and programmes.
Sustainability appraisal	SA	A systematic process (a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) aimed at appraising the social, environmental and economic effects of plan, strategies and policies to ensure they accord with the objectives of sustainable development. SA also incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive.
Tests of soundness		Plans must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.
Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations		The regulations set out the public participation and consultation required when preparing and revising a statutory plan. Regulations 18, 19, 20 relate to informal and formal consultations of plan preparation. Regulation 24 relates to the independent examination of the plan.