

DRAFT VERSION 7

## Cherwell - Our District; Our Future

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## CONTENTS

<b>A vision for Cherwell</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. What is a sustainable community and what is this strategy for?	4
1.2. The role of the Local Strategic Partnership	4
1.3. How did we develop this strategy?	4
1.4. Our pledge to you	5
1.5. What's in this strategy?	6
<b>2. Cherwell today</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Future Challenges</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1. Adapting to Climate Change	10
3.2. Building communities and reducing inequality	10
3.3. Adapting to an aging population	11
3.4. Empowering the next generation	11
3.5. Diverse Communities	12
3.6. Managing growth	12
3.7. Tight resources and creating prosperity	13
3.8. Strengthening local participation	13
<b>4. A diverse economy – the economic pledge</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1. Our economic objectives	15
4.2. 5 year focus	16
4.3. Local Focus	17
<b>5. Opportunities for All – the community pledge</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1. The Community Objectives	19
5.2. 5 year focus	21
5.3. Local focus	22
<b>6. Connected and protected – the infrastructure and environment pledge</b>	<b>23</b>
6.1. Our Infrastructure and Environmental Objectives	24
6.2. 5 year focus	25
6.3. Local focus	26
<b>7. How will we do it? - the leadership pledge</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>8. Acknowledgements</b>	<b>28</b>

## DRAFT VERSION 7

### **A vision for Cherwell in 2030**

**“A diverse economy with opportunities for all, vibrant communities connected by a sense of pride, place and purpose”.**

Welcome to the Cherwell sustainable community strategy. This document presents a long term vision for the district, our shared hopes and aspirations and the challenges we face. The Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership has developed this strategy based on extensive consultation and engagement and in it we set out the steps we will take to make sure this vision takes shape in our district.

The Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership is made up of representatives from across the public, private and voluntary sectors and we work closely together, getting the most out of our collective experience, resources, knowledge and enthusiasm to ensure we meet the high expectations of the people who live and work here. We intend to ensure a bright future for the next generation.

#### **Cherwell in 2030**

We believe that by 2030, Cherwell will be a district more prosperous than it is today. Those who live and work here will be happier, healthier and feel safer with high aspirations and expectations. People will feel they belong here and diversity will be celebrated. Everyone will share in a better quality of life.

In Cherwell older people will lead independent and healthy lives for longer with access to excellent services. Young people will have high personal aspirations, satisfied by a wide variety of local opportunities to achieve appropriate skills, qualifications and jobs.

The quality of our natural and built environment will be cherished and our resources protected. We will embrace environmental technologies and adapt our behaviour to meet the global challenge of climate change.

Our economy will be vibrant and diverse; local people will be skilled and able to access good jobs. Our economy will have grown to provide employment for our increasing population and reduce the need for our residents to travel outside the district for work.

We will have maintained the vitality of our urban centres as economic and social hubs, offering a vibrant evening economy, as well as improved leisure and shopping. Our villages will be “lived in” as well as “slept in”, helping to sustain a rural way of life with an economic base that is not be reliant entirely on agriculture.

By 2030 we will have welcomed more houses, paying particular attention to both the quality and the affordability of those badly needed additional homes. Careful investment in our infrastructure will increase the capacity of our communities and address current deficiencies in provision. In particular, we will focus on reducing road congestion and improving public transport.

The Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership and people across the district will work together towards achieving this vision of the future and, as we do, we will celebrate our achievements and successes along the way.

#### **The Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership**

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 What is a sustainable community and what is this strategy for?

Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of us all, current and future residents, their children and those who do business here. They contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choices for everyone. They make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

The purpose of this document is to set out our overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Cherwell district until 2030, in a way that tells the 'story of the place' – a distinctive vision for the area, backed by clear evidence and analysis. All other strategies, and the plans of organisations across Cherwell delivering them, will reflect the long term aspirations contained here.

Because this strategy was developed in the turbulent economic times of 2009, we have adopted a **5 year focus** for our objectives under each pledge and a **local focus** where specific places have specific issues. These objectives are not intended to last us until 2030. Circumstances will change and progress will be made and it is vital the aims we have identified during the summer of 2009 are regularly refreshed and revisited to make sure they still work for us. This strategy has an associated implementation plan and links into the Local Area Agreement for Oxfordshire. Both will be used to drive delivery and assess our progress towards our ultimate goals.

### 1.2 The role of the Local Strategic Partnership

The Local Strategic Partnership is made up of representatives from Cherwell's public, voluntary and private sectors. The partnership is responsible for developing the community strategy for the district and ensuring the objectives, priorities and actions it contains are delivered.

### 1.3 How did we develop this strategy?

We have worked hard to speak to as many people as possible, councillors, community and voluntary groups, faith leaders, local business representatives, head teachers, and many others to develop the vision, pledges and objectives within this strategy.

We have asked about people's aspirations and ambitions for the area and their views on what we can all do to bring them about.

We have looked at the statistical evidence available both for current issues and what challenges we face in the future. We have thought about how we fit with our

## DRAFT VERSION 7

neighbouring counties and districts and considered regional strategies, the Oxfordshire vision and strategy for 2030 and our own Local Development Framework.

This plan reflects what we have heard through our consultation and builds upon the successes of our current strategy, the Cherwell Community Plan 2006 -2011. It's a shared vision and it's up to all of us to work together to make it a reality.

### **1.4 Our pledge to you**

The purpose of this document is to focus on where we face challenges. But we must always remember that Cherwell is a great place to live and work; a thriving area of diverse population and beautiful countryside. We intend, through the use of this strategy, to make sure it stays that way. We will bring about the change and development that we need by working together across four closely linked themes.

#### **A Diverse Economy – the economic pledge**

By 2030 we will have a diverse industry base and appropriately skilled workforce that can adapt to climate change supported by a well planned and effective infrastructure of housing, transport, leisure and services. We will have experienced significant growth in housing development and have linked this to supporting the population to gain the skills and flexibility to access local jobs and attract new businesses into the area which, in turn, encourages our younger population to stay or return here. Our farming and rural areas will have seen a revitalisation following a resurgence in localism, support for local products and businesses and appropriate evolution of its villages.

#### **Opportunities for All – the community pledge**

By 2030 we will have thriving communities where everyone, regardless of their personal circumstances, feels safe in their homes and welcome in their neighbourhoods. A society where older people are able to live independently and where younger generations have the skills and opportunities to build their future. Our communities will value the contribution made by a wide spectrum of voluntary organisations and volunteers and the shared values of our faith groups. Disadvantaged families and residents will be supported to help themselves benefit from the new housing, educational and economic opportunities available to them. A consistently innovative and varied range of cultural events will build a sense of place and a unique identity for the district.

#### **Connected and Protected – the infrastructure and environment pledge**

By 2030 we will understand and adapt to environmental challenges as they arise and ensure that all infrastructure and other developments prioritise the protection our environment and biodiversity. We will protect our rich natural and built environment and heritage, using our resources wisely and helping people to live sustainable lifestyles. Our transport and housing will be appropriate to our needs and will be adaptable to the changes in our communities. Cherwell will be at the forefront of exploring alternative technologies and recycling, utilising its connections to innovative industry to do so, and making real progress towards being a carbon neutral district.

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## How will we do it? - the leadership pledge

By 2030 Cherwell will be characterised by our responsiveness to our changing population. Our partnerships will take a key role in delivering services, fostering community cohesion and managing our resources, directing them to where there is most need. We will champion our identity within regional structures, and our relationships with neighbouring areas. Our public services will be open and accountable with clear lines of communication between the public, private and voluntary sectors. We will have exemplary consultation and communications processes. We'll generate and share accurate, relevant and intelligent information, and enable a vibrant, engaged and inclusive Cherwell that relishes dialogue and debate and listens to everyone's different opinions and experiences.

## TO BE COMPLETED AFTER JULY CCPP LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

### 1.5 What is in this strategy?

This document contains the key elements that combine to reflect the district and make up the strategy. The content is based upon statistical evidence, regional and county wide strategies already in place and the opinions and views of residents. There is much to do and the priorities identified here will go into an implementation plan to be worked on by the Partnership in the short, medium and long term.

Seeing into the future is always challenging, but, what we can do is to take the best evidence we currently have, listen carefully to the sort of place and lives that our residents want, and tailor our aspirations accordingly. This process has helped us understand what we wish to protect about our area now, what we want to change and what new ideas we want to embrace in so we can hand on a thriving district to future generations.

**The vision** explains what we all want to see for the future of Cherwell based on what we have heard through our consultation and the key challenges that we face. A district is not simply a collection of geographic features, individuals and series of issues and agendas: a district is a place with an identity and culture of its own.

**Cherwell today** explains the context in which we live and work and describes the features and character of the district.

**Future challenges** covers what we think are the most important, cross-cutting, themes that run throughout the rest of the document and the issues that we feel are important to bear in mind as we tackle our objectives.

**The four pledges: economic, community, environment and leadership.** Each pledge has its own section which reflects our opportunities and challenges and contains a description of our objectives and priorities. Further analysis of the challenges can be found in the **Digging a Bit Deeper** analysis document accompanying this strategy.

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## 2 Cherwell today

### Our location

Cherwell district covers an area of 590 square kilometres (228 square miles) in north Oxfordshire. Named after the River Cherwell which flows through it, the district is located between London and Birmingham, at the most northern point of the South East region, where it meets the West Midlands and East Midlands. The M40 passes through Cherwell and there are good rail connections to London and Birmingham.

137,600 people live in Cherwell. Over 60% of the population live in the principal centres of Banbury (approx 43,000), Bicester (approx 30,500) and Kidlington (approx 13,000); the rest in more than 70 smaller settlements of between 50 and 3500 people. 85% of the district is attractive farmland and 14% lies within the Oxford Green Belt, contributing to making Cherwell the 12th least densely populated district in the South East. But the district also has a rich built heritage, with approximately 3,000 listed buildings (8.6% of the South East's total) and 54 conservation areas.

### Our changing population

Between 1991 and 2001 Cherwell's population increased by almost 12% and has by a further 4.5% since. Growth predictions of a further 8% by 2016 and a cumulative 15.6% by 2026 are significantly higher than regional and national rates. Most of the recent growth has been in Banbury and Bicester and this will continue. Bicester's population is projected to grow by 13.8% between 2001 and 2016. Our challenge is to ensure that the levels of housing growth required across the district can be accommodated, while protecting and enhancing the character of our urban centres, villages and landscapes.

Our population is changing. The 2001 Census showed that 3.9% of the district's population was of non-white ethnic origin. These low numbers were generally widely dispersed, apart from higher concentrations in some Banbury Wards (such as Banbury Grimsbury where 10.9% was of black or minority ethnic origin). 2006 estimates indicate that the non-white population has grown to 5.9% overall. In 2001 7.5% of the population considered themselves to belong to a group other than white British. By 2006 this had grown to 10.7%. Our research and experience demonstrates that this growth has come and continues to come from migrant workers from Polish and other Eastern European communities.

Cherwell now has the highest proportion of 0-15 year olds in Oxfordshire and there is strong demand from parents and their children for affordable activities for young people. By 2031 the population is forecast to age dramatically, with numbers in each of the over 65s, over 75s, and over 85s bands increasing by at least 23 percentage points above national rates, and by more than 47 percentage points for over 85s. We have to continue anticipating the future services required by our older population, building on our strong track record of ensuring the needs of older residents are met.

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## **Economy, skills and aspirations**

In 1995 manufacturing jobs accounted for 28.9% of employment in the district. By 2006 they accounted for 14.1% with this shift matched by a growth in the service and tourism sectors, particularly in distribution, hotels and restaurants, and transport and communications. Our historically high employment rates have been maintained through this change, although the employment mix means that earnings from Cherwell workplaces are 3.9% below the national average.

Residents' earnings, however, are just above the national average. Bicester, for example, has a particularly high proportion of residents employed in higher level positions. 65% of Bicester's residents leave the town to work. We must continue the push to attract more high-tech, knowledge-based industries in order to provide more local, attractive employment opportunities to these residents. At the same time we need to raise aspirations and the demand for skills in Banbury where there is an above average concentration of people employed in low-skilled and lower paid occupations. But if new opportunities are to be accessible to our own young people, the performance of school pupils at GCSE needs to be brought at least in line with county and national averages.

Our rural areas have a relatively low business density compared with the regional rural average, although levels of home-based working are higher in Cherwell than in the rest of Oxfordshire and in the South East. Although farming employment has declined almost 90% since 1990, farming retains its vital role in maintaining the environment and defining our district.

## **Community challenges**

Cherwell is ranked as the 276th least deprived of 354 Local Authority areas by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, this masks a number of issues of deprivation and disadvantage. Two parts of Banbury Ruscote ward are in the 20% most deprived areas nationally and Cherwell has six of the 12 most deprived areas in Oxfordshire. In terms of education, skills and training, crime and living environment, 15 areas in Banbury and Bicester are in the 20% most deprived nationally and 15 areas across 11 rural wards feature in the 10% most deprived for barriers to housing and services. We have to focus on addressing the needs of the disadvantaged whether, for example, the rurally isolated, older people and those with disabilities, people from black or minority ethnic communities or those in particular localities.

In 2004 Cherwell had an annual shortfall of 686 affordable homes, the highest in Oxfordshire, outside Oxford. While this has been reduced to 529, increasing the numbers of affordable homes remains one of the population's and District Council's top priorities. The 2007 median house price to income ratio is 8.9, up from 7.7 in 2005, above both South East and English averages, only reinforcing the focus needed on this.

Cherwell is a safe place to live. Overall crime levels dropped by 13.2% between 2003/04 and 2007/08 (a real reduction of 794 reported crimes), compared with a 10.9% reduction across Thames Valley. Most of the crime recorded in Cherwell is committed in the urban areas. But residents are concerned about the visibility of police officers and response rates in our rural areas and a view that these are contributing to lower reporting levels and therefore lower resources. In 2006 residents across the district felt less safe than those in any other Oxfordshire district in terms of being alone and walking alone during the day or at night. And anti-social behaviour is a key concern of residents. Addressing residents' perception of crime and delivering lower levels of crime and anti-social behaviour are priorities.



## DRAFT VERSION 7

Cherwell compares well with the rest of the country on most health indicators and the health of children and young people overall is better than the national average. But there are health inequalities by location, gender and ethnicity. For example, Cherwell has a high and rising rate of teenage conception with four out of six Banbury Wards in the highest 20% in England in 2005. We must work to eliminate these inequalities, delivering affordable recreational opportunities to help residents of all ages stay healthy, and securing the long-term future of Banbury's Horton District General Hospital and, with it, accessible healthcare services for people everywhere in the district.

### **Environment and infrastructure**

Cherwell residents travel further to work than people in the rest of the South East and nationally. Car ownership overall is high and residents in our rural areas are particularly dependent on their cars. Our dependence on our cars has produced a number of congestion hotspots in the district, not least at junction 9 of the M40, on the A34, in the centres of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington at times and in the villages with schools. Significant planned improvements to the railway infrastructure will better connect Bicester to Oxford and London and re-instate Kidlington's long-lost rail connections to Oxford. Such improvements will bring enormous benefits but will need to be complemented by much work to change attitudes to public transport and our willingness to walk more and cycle more.

High levels of out-commuting contribute of course to environmental issues and these are another reason for trying to influence the employment and skills mix in the district. Per capita carbon dioxide emissions in Cherwell in 2004 were significantly higher than regional and national levels, although domestic emissions were the lowest in Oxfordshire. Cherwell's residents are committed to recycling with excellent rates

Currently, people identify with the urban or rural settlements where they live in but not strongly with Cherwell as a district. Some residents have strong relationships with other areas outside our area, for example those who commute to other towns for work, shopping or to access services such as health services in Oxford. Banbury in particular considers itself to be independent of the other parts of Cherwell, Kidlington is keen to retain its village identity with its population of 13,000 and, in common with Bicester, wants to improve its image and demonstrate less reliance on Oxford.

### **Cherwell into the future**

This overview provides a sense of Cherwell as a place and sets the scene for the future challenges we are facing and the steps we need to take to retain our many strengths and make the best of the opportunities we have.

### **3. Future Challenges**

In Cherwell we have good homes, work, enjoy beautiful countryside and have a sense of pride and satisfaction with where we live. Nonetheless, we face some challenges through global warming; a changing and growing population with a higher proportion of older people, fewer young people and significant development of housing and new communities needing to be welcomed. In the coming years there will be political and policy changes along the way, we'll need to develop and deliver new services and there can never be enough resources to do everything we want.

We don't know exactly what will happen economically, socially or environmentally and the challenges will change over time, but this strategy equips us to cope whatever happens. The themes in this section indicate where we need to focus our attention and plan for what is to come.

#### **3.1 Adapting to Climate Change**

In the South East of England by the 2050s the average summer temperature could be around 3C warmer, rainfall could decrease by 40% and winter rainfall could increase by 20%. We face dramatic changes as we enter an era when fossil fuels are more expensive and less available. It is our responsibility to take a robust approach and adapt to these climate and environmental changes as they occur. We must plan effectively now so we can meet the challenge. We all as individuals, businesses or organisations need to find new ways to lead sustainable lifestyles reducing our carbon emissions, energy and water use.

Traffic volumes and limited public transport across the area are two of the biggest challenges and we have considerable commuting within and to and from the district and heavy traffic at 'hotspots'. There is significant housing growth planned for our area and this has implications for managing flood risks, making sure our buildings are as carbon-neutral as possible and providing an effective and responsive infrastructure. Protecting the countryside and our biodiversity is vital for impact on climate change and also a key priority.

#### **3.2 Building strong communities and reducing inequality**

Cherwell is a prosperous area with a history of high employment and high standards of living, but is also being affected by the 2009 economic downturn leading to some vacancies in high streets and an increase in unemployment.

Despite its prosperity, Banbury has areas within two wards that fall into the category of high deprivation, resulting in some cases in poor academic achievement, low skills and a higher rate of teenage pregnancy in Banbury than elsewhere. There are also some pockets of deprivation elsewhere and we need to find ways to identify and address hidden inequality. Hardship is especially difficult to identify in rural areas, where our traditional sources of evidence fail to provide us with detailed information to identify those who are in need of extra support and assistance.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

The challenge for Cherwell Sustainable Community Strategy is to tackle existing and emerging inequalities of opportunity, especially health inequalities, and to build cohesive communities with a strong sense of belonging.

### **3.3 Adapting to an aging population**

Like many other areas of the country, our older population is predicted to double between 2009 and 2031. It is vital that we develop flexible and accessible services that meet our future needs and support independent living for as long as necessary.

There is a need for adequate care services, both for people still living independently who want to lead active lives and for those for whom independent living is no longer possible. This is magnified in rural areas where access to services, particularly health care, and other activities is limited. Housing is also problematic for some older people who can no longer maintain their homes and need to live in smaller one-level housing with facilities for outside space a room to accommodate visiting families. There is shortage of small properties available, an issue which affects younger and older people alike and around Bicester there is also a specific issue around people retiring from the MOD and needing to resettle.

Our challenge is to address isolation and fear of crime, ensure that accommodation is appropriate to need, that a range of activities engage older people in the community and that they are well cared for in a range of settings. This older population offers Cherwell a great opportunity to fully harness the skills, knowledge and experience that is gained through maturity and many older people provide vital community activities through volunteering that would simply not exist without them. Their skills, time and experience are valuable and important. As one participant in a workshop said:

*"I'm old now but you will become old, its your future we're discussing, not mine".*

### **3.4 Empowering the next generation**

Our younger people are our future, moving towards being active, engaged citizens and playing a full role in shaping and maintaining our communities. It is vital that we keep them safe, encourage them to take their place in democratic processes, they have a chance to express their opinions and help us to understand contemporary life now and in the future. They are a great resource and we are determined to offer them the best chances they can have to build fulfilling and rewarding lives.

There is concern that some young people in Cherwell seem to lack aspiration beyond basic jobs or their immediate neighbourhoods. One cause of this may be the level of academic success young people are achieving, but it also about facilities and spaces for young people, parenting influences and not having enough awareness of what is on offer. Overall there is a strong desire to improve their achievements and prospects so that they too have the opportunity to secure employment and take part in the prosperous economy around them. We are aware that not all young people are being equipped with the skills they need to get work and have a career. A common refrain from young people is about a lack of facilities and activities. Some young people are affected by rural inaccessibility and are unable to use facilities which are usually held in the three urban areas. There are sometimes very simple solutions on offer. As one young person said:

## DRAFT VERSION 7

*“there are only two activities in my village during the week and they are on the same night so I can’t do both!”*

Addressing the issues associated with young people requires a real commitment to include and listen to them. We need to engage young people in their communities, support everyone to gain skills, raise aspirations and ensure this has a positive impact on the quality of life for everyone.

### 3.5 Diverse communities

Diverse communities add to cultural vibrancy and a mix of approaches leads to a better understanding of different ways of life. Our projected growth over the coming years means existing communities evolving and some altogether new ones emerging. We will continue to welcome those who choose to make Cherwell their home, including them in our towns, villages and way of life and embrace the contribution they make to our district and identity.

Banbury has a significant Kashmiri and Polish community, the Kashmiri community is established as it has been settling here since the 1950s and plays an active role in many community activities. The Polish and Eastern European community, which has settled more recently, is not faring so well. Some people from these communities are living in overcrowded accommodation, do not have legal status here and are existing on low wages. More importantly perhaps they are not really engaging with existing communities and there is some evidence of racism in schools against these communities.

Another significant group is MOD service personnel and their families. The mobile nature of employment in this community means that it is more difficult for families to assimilate and become accepted in schools and communities.

As Cherwell continues to build exemplary inclusive communities it is vital that in celebrating and supporting our diversity we are led by the needs of our residents covering all seven strands of equalities: age, disability, faith, gender, race, sexual orientation and transgender. Effective consultation and engagement is an essential part of making sure that fair and accessible services for everyone are developed.

### 3.6 Managing growth

These are exciting times for our district, one of growth and expansion, welcoming new development as an indicator of our success and as the foundation for our future prosperity and dynamism. New housing development will enable us to build more successful and thriving towns and bring ideas and resources into our villages which need new families and employees, new entrepreneurs and volunteers to continue to evolve over time. This raises significant challenges to our communities in accompanying this growth with a matching rate of investment in infrastructure and community services, growing our economy to provide jobs, ensuring our centres are equipped to service this increased community and encouraging residents to identify with their neighbourhoods and take part in community life.

*“We need infrastructure **before** expansion for it all to make sense”* consultee

## DRAFT VERSION 7

It is our job to be sure that we take a strategic and holistic view of where and how we introduce this expansion. The Local Development Framework sets the direction and it is vital to keep a clear eye on how our district works, building on existing resources and introducing new ones where needed. This represents a great opportunity to plan our built environment in order to make significant contributions to all our key challenges, many of which are affected by the way our infrastructure and housing works.

### **3.7 Tight resources and creating prosperity**

Managing resources is a key challenge for us and we will make sure that we utilise what is available across the partnership to maximum effect. The money available to support change and meet challenges is going to be affected by the economic downturn; the public sector may have rather less to spend. Many of the plans that were in development already may be delayed. We are realistic about the fact that we will not have the resources to do everything immediately.

We have some gaps in facilities, and we must now look at how we can address this in a climate of scarce public and private sector investment; ensuring the growth in housing is accompanied by investment from both the private sector through planning contributions and the public sector in their investment programmes. The prosperity of the district is not the sole responsibility of our public sector and our overall wealth and development will be immensely affected by our local economy and the wealth this generates within communities. This is why our economy is a key theme in this strategy, helping to bring about the prosperity and wealth we need locally to help fund our plans and ambitions.

Tough decisions will need to be made between sometimes conflicting priorities. It is our responsibility to balance these tensions and a key principle here is to ensure that resources follow need, balancing the focus on deprived areas and the need for services across the district. We need our community to be fully engaged and involved in decision making, and for expenditure to be based on agreed priorities and their impact on the area. More than ever we will need to harness the abilities of our public, private and voluntary sectors to improve our capacity to deliver what is needed. This may mean some significant work to increase capacity where needed so that collectively we can meet the challenges.

### **3.8 Strengthening local participation**

We actively support the role of Councillors at all levels as champions and representatives of their local community.

An often overlooked feature of a strong community is the contribution made by volunteers in delivering services, caring for neighbours or running clubs and activities. Volunteering makes a significant contribution to wellbeing in our district and is rewarding for the volunteers as well as for those they help.

Our challenge is to work with Councillors as community leaders, to engage people from all communities, to support volunteers and to ensure that people from across the district can have a voice in political change.

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<sup>8</sup> ABI, 2007

## 4. A diverse economy – the economic pledge

**By 2030 we will have a diverse industry base and appropriately skilled workforce that can adapt to climate change supported by a well planned and effective infrastructure of housing, transport, leisure and services. We will have experienced significant growth in housing development and have linked this to supporting the population to gain the skills and flexibility to access local jobs and attract new businesses into the area which, in turn, encourages our younger population to stay or return here. Our farming and rural areas will have seen a revitalisation following a resurgence in localism, support for local products and businesses and appropriate evolution of villages.**

The economic pledge considers the jobs we have now and the jobs we would like to have in the future, the skills of our workforce and the wealth of enterprise and innovation on our doorstep. A vibrant and diverse economy is the bedrock on which we can build a sustainable future. Cherwell has long been a prosperous district with very low unemployment, a wide variety of successful businesses and thriving towns and villages. However, as this strategy has been developed, the national and global economy has seen its worst downturn for 50 years and this has forced us all to evaluate how comfortable we are and how potentially vulnerable we might become.

*“The ‘credit crunch’ has forced us all to take a long look at what we want for our district’s economy and has given us a chance to pause and plan now for the future.” Consultee*

We recognise that much of our economic stability and growth comes from small and medium sized businesses and it is these entrepreneurial companies which provide most employment and growth. These businesses and our rural enterprises need support as well as those which are at the cutting edge of innovation and technology or the larger employers who provide great opportunities locally. Retail is an important business sector, especially our town centres and Bicester Village, a creator of local jobs and a significant tourist draw.

Everyone in our community has the right to earn a good living and have an interesting job that they enjoy, enabling them to provide for themselves and their families and to reap the benefits that a stable income can provide.

There is a well-documented trend towards locally produced food, goods and services and the protection of our environment, which represents an opportunity to shape our own district. We are lucky to have some excellent food producers and rural enterprises perfectly positioned to take advantage of the growing demand and others ready to take up the environmental challenges. Our rural enterprises have already diversified into a wide range of industries and tourism is a strong contributor to our local economy.

Finally, as the key challenges section of this strategy has outlined, we are facing an aging population and a rapidly growing one. We need to be secure in the knowledge that there are opportunities to utilise the skills and experience of our older residents and that we are providing great chances for the younger ones.

Together, we will work towards an innovative and resilient economy that offers a variety of opportunities, celebrates the success of our enterprises, supports our workforce and enables Cherwell residents to thrive in our towns, villages and countryside.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

### Did you know?

- There are 68,000 jobs (80% in service industries) in 5,800 VAT registered businesses in Cherwell with a healthy surplus of new VAT registrations, an illustration of an entrepreneurial culture.
- The district has a higher than average proportion of jobs in manufacturing, with 12.3% falling into this sector, compared to 8.5 % across the south east region<sup>8</sup>. Businesses in Cherwell are generally small with only 16% having 10 or more employees<sup>9</sup>.
- Farming employment in Oxfordshire has declined by almost 20% since 1990.
- Tourism related expenditure translated to over £294m<sup>10</sup> worth of income for local businesses. It is estimated that tourism activity in the district supports 5,728 jobs in Cherwell.
- There is 3.9 % unemployment but JSA claimant levels only total 1400. In December 2008, there were 1400 claimants of job seekers allowance across the district<sup>11</sup>.
- The ratio of jobs to working age population is higher than both the regional and national comparators<sup>12</sup> but there are 6800 economically inactive people wanting a job (45% higher than UK average)
- Cherwell has a skills profile similar to UK average (50% NVQ Level 3 +) but well below the Oxfordshire averages<sup>13</sup> and wage rates are lower than figures for the region or nationally.
- 8% of 16 – 19 year olds are not in education or employment<sup>14</sup>

### 4.1 Our economic objectives

#### We will:

1. Raise expectations and ambitions and provide a range of economic opportunities for everyone including lifelong learning and retraining. We will foster and develop alternative ways of accessing employment such as apprenticeships, volunteering or work-based training.
2. Manage our infrastructure development, matching housing growth with local jobs, transport to work, facilities and services. We will plan effectively for our future workforce and employment patterns, focusing on what we need to achieve in raising our skills and attracting the right businesses into the area.
3. Promote and support business diversification and a sustainable economy in both urban and rural environments. Protect and grow local services and businesses, while supporting town centres to be attractive economic hubs for the district.

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<sup>9</sup> Broadly in line with the UK as a whole. ABI,2007

<sup>10</sup> Tourism Impact Report 2007

<sup>11</sup> JSA, 2008

<sup>12</sup> ONS jobs density, 2006

<sup>13</sup> ONS, 2001

<sup>14</sup> 2001 Census

## DRAFT VERSION 7

### 4.2 5 year focus

In this section we will outline our priorities and steps we will take to meet our economic objectives in the coming five years. The list below reflects the ideas and suggestions we have developed from our consultation to date. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

#### **Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review**

- Tackle the causes of under achievement which include poor housing, lack of access to transport, social and economic culture, education and training.
- Improve access to skills, training and employment opportunities skills (link to national performance indicator 163 Working age population qualified to at least level 3 or higher)
- Enable a good supply of housing and a wide range of affordable housing opportunities to ensure that housing provision is able to support the development of the local economy and people's ambitions and needs (link to national performance indicator 154 Net additional homes provided)
- Create strong links between the private, public and voluntary sector with clear roles and contributions to the economic, aspiration and skills agenda.
- Promote environmentally sensitive and innovative enterprise, supporting new initiatives that may help to adapt to changes in the climate.
- Attract and retain the right sort of industries, a balance between high and lower technology industries, understanding that not everyone wants to achieve in only academic terms and that not all businesses are high-tech.
- Develop a North Oxfordshire focused inward investment strategy using the vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy to promote the area to investors.
- Fully exploit any opportunities that come from the proximity to Oxford and spin-off academic industries.



## DRAFT VERSION 7

### 4.3 Local Focus - Economy

We recognise that different areas across the district will have their own priorities and we will identify specific actions to address them. The list below outlines the feedback we have received from our initial consultation. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

#### **Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review**

##### **Banbury**

- Improve the percentage of Banbury residents with skills and qualifications (in specific areas/locations)
- Develop skills and qualifications to reflect the needs of local businesses
- Fully utilise the College resources and encourage engagement with the population and businesses.
- Support and develop the town centre to maintain thriving shops and cultural activities in a pleasant and safe environment

##### **Bicester**

- Reduce the number of residents commuting out of the area for work by increasing the number and variety of jobs available locally
- Build upon the accessibility of Bicester, its skilled workforce and location within the O2C Arc to attract new businesses
- Implement the town centre development and improved rail connections
- Tackle the congestion issues and improve the availability of business premises

##### **Kidlington**

- Encourage stronger links between all industrial areas, the airport and local residents and the village centre
- Support the development of the civic and shopping areas of the village
- Position Kidlington as a unique place in the O2C Arc on account of the airport and its proximity to Oxford
- Explore the full commercial and recreational potential of the Canal and Airport

##### **Rural Areas**

- Support local shops and businesses to serve their rural communities and create jobs
- Encourage diversification of farms and other rural businesses to enable the creation of local employment and reduce commuting
- Explore opportunities to pool resources and community facilities to provide new commercial opportunities
- Ensure that broadband provision is maintained and improved to support increased home working

## 5. Opportunities for All – the community pledge

**By 2030 we will have thriving communities where everyone, regardless of their personal circumstances, feels safe in their homes and welcome in their neighbourhoods. A society where older people are able to live independently and where younger generations have the skills and opportunities to build their future. Our communities will value the contribution made by a wide spectrum of voluntary organisations and volunteers and the shared values of our faith groups. Disadvantaged families and residents will be supported to help themselves benefit from the new housing, educational and economic opportunities available to them. A consistently innovative and varied range of cultural events will build a sense of place and a unique identity for the district.**

Cherwell does not hit national headlines for poor education, housing, or significant socio-economic problems. The communities within Cherwell are generally harmonious, healthy and have a sense of coherence. People like where they live, have a strong allegiance to their town or village and strong feelings about what does and doesn't work. Communities are often very local, at a neighbourhood or estate level, and not necessarily as attached to their surrounds or Cherwell as a whole. Some places have already experienced rapid population growth and development, which has diluted local identity and a sense of belonging. The arts, culture and creative industries of the area make a vibrant contribution to our communities. They provide recreation, companionship and shared interests within groups and societies and are often a focus for community activity.

*“A successful community is comfortable, green, caring, confident, clean, sharing and learning.” Consultee*

We see communities as people brought together by common interests, culture, activities and geography, including and focusing on those who do not benefit as much as they could from the area. Those which may need extra support in Cherwell include young people, older people, young families, and people moving into the area from outside the UK and marginalised communities, for example people with disabilities or from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Traditional rural villages are experiencing changes, an erosion of the younger population, local employment and services. Residents are passionate about keeping their villages thriving and inclusive. It is the areas which impact on our quality of life that are the focus of this section, specifically sense of community spirit, educational achievement and aspirations, health, well-being, housing and a sense of belonging. We want to ensure a high level of community capacity and engagement, supporting communities to find their own solutions.

There are issues which need our attention if they are not to become longer term problems. For example, secondary education is of concern in the area. Older people, young people and young families can experience isolation, especially in the rural part of Cherwell which is a significant proportion of the area. There are some areas which suffer from anti-social behaviour, especially in our town centres and at night, which impacts on those using these centres, affecting their sense of safety and may hinder our towns' development as cultural hubs in the longer term. Giving young people plenty to do, increased facilities and encouraging greater engagement has been shown to decrease the incidence of such behaviour.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

Housing is a big concern for everyone. There is a shortage of social housing, a shortage of affordable housing generally and uncertainty within communities about the impact of housing growth upon their area and how they can influence this. However, it must be remembered that Cherwell also has a breathtaking array of listed buildings and a generally high quality built environment, villages and towns. We already have the Local development Framework to structure our approach to tackling our challenges and most parishes have completed parish plans or are working on them to inform our decisions.

### Did you know?

- Health indicators show that the health of residents in the area is better than in Oxfordshire or England, new facilities are opening and life expectancy is above average.
- Older people will make up an increasingly large percentage of the population, with projections of 21% of overall population for the over 65s and up to 20% for the elderly population (85+).
- The level of qualifications achieved across the area is low with only a third of Banbury residents having qualifications and 28% in Kidlington.
- The percentage of children achieving 5+ GCSE at A\*- C level is significantly lower than the national average although it is improving.
- Average net household income is £24,336 and entry level property costs £118,000, leading to an increasing gap between what can be afforded and what is available.
- 96% of the population classifies itself as white.
- Fear of crime is the highest in the county although crime levels are comparatively low.
- Two parts of the Banbury Ruscot ward are in the 20% most deprived super output areas nationally. Teenage pregnancy in the area is higher than the national average and going against a national downturn, suggesting underlying problems amongst young people relating to lack of aspirations and disaffection.
- Rural isolation is a key feature of the area affecting older, younger and poorer people more profoundly. 11 rural wards fall into the 10% most deprived in terms of access to housing and services.

### 5.1 Our Community Objectives

Whilst overall the area enjoys a relatively high quality of life, good employment levels and relatively high standards of living, there are underlying issues around deprivation, social exclusion and disaffection emerging in some areas. In the long term, demographic shifts in population growth and age will present some priority areas to focus on. We are already working together to build stronger and safer communities and will continue to do so, ensuring that the vital role of voluntary and community groups is acknowledged and valued for the contribution it makes.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

### **We will:**

1. Provide support for older people to ensure they can live independently for as long as possible and appropriate facilities and care are delivered.
2. Focus activity on deprived areas of both urban and rural Cherwell to ensure that communities do not develop further into the “haves” and “have not’s” leading to cohesive neighbourhoods where all people receive their fair share, get on well together, and have a real sense of belonging.
2. Offer high quality education, support and opportunities to our young people to achieve suitable and appropriate qualifications to enable them to realise their ambitions
3. Decrease the percentages of people who fear crime and feel unsafe in their area, reducing the incidences of anti-social behaviour and building confidence in the police.
4. Maintain and develop health services, including preventive health programmes, that directly address health inequality and which enable residents to access services and information in order to lead healthy lives.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

### 5.2 5 year focus

In this section we will outline our priorities and steps we will take to meet our community objectives in the coming five years. The list below reflects the ideas and suggestions we have developed from our consultation to date. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

#### **Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review**

- Support older people to live independently.
- Support the role of volunteers, the community and churches and other faiths in sustaining the wellbeing of the district and in delivering much needed local activity.
- Increase opportunities to access lifelong learning and re-training.
- Improve educational attainment and better access to post-16 qualifications.
- To ensure that the expansion of housing and provision of housing address the inherent link to community cohesion through effective design and investment, providing a range of housing options.
- Work to build a sense of strong community across the district.
- Improve access to services for BME communities to address inequalities in education, access to services and to support integration.
- Targeted support for young people to put on and engage them in appropriate activities and increase their aspirations and a reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training.
- Reduce fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Reduce levels of crime.
- Ensure that healthcare is accessible to people, particularly people in rural settings, without transport or people who have difficulty getting around.
- Undertake a health inequalities programme that narrows the gap in life expectancy across the district.
- Improve levels of health and well being in priority groups.

# DRAFT VERSION 7

## 5.3 Local Focus - Community

We recognise that different areas across the district will have their own priorities and we will identify specific actions to address them. The list below outlines the feedback we have received from our initial consultation. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

### Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review

#### Banbury

- Address and reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy
- Improve school attendance and achievement
- Reduce incidence of anti-social behaviour
- Improve support for new communities to access services and have their needs met

#### Bicester

- Raise young people's aspirations, facilities and opportunities
- Manage Bicester's rapid growth with extra effort to integrate new and emerging communities
- Improve leisure facilities
- Increase the sense of pride and belonging to Bicester to create more community cohesion

#### Kidlington

- Increase consultation with and facilities for young people
- Ensure sufficient access to services for a village of this size
- Increase provision of a range of housing options and especially affordable housing

#### Rural Areas

- Design and deliver appropriate services to the right people on an outreach basis or at least being sure that there is adequate transport to centres of support.
- Develop new ways of identifying deprivation in rural areas to understand where resources are needed.
- Define the role of the police in rural low-crime areas and what it can reasonably be expected to deliver
- Provide a range of and more affordable housing, including villages in the planning process.
- Increased support for youth, senior and community activities in rural locations. Explore the options for creative use of community buildings

## 6. Connected and protected – the infrastructure and environment pledge

**By 2030 we will understand and adapt to environmental challenges as they arise and ensure that all infrastructure and other developments prioritise the protection our environment and biodiversity. We will protect our rich natural and built environment and heritage, using our resources wisely and helping people to live sustainable lifestyles. Our transport and housing will be appropriate to our needs and will be adaptable to the changes in our communities. Cherwell will be at the forefront of exploring alternative technologies and recycling, utilising its connections to innovative industry to do so, and making real progress towards being a carbon neutral district.**

The built and natural environment is a unique selling point for Cherwell and one of the main reasons that communities and businesses choose to locate or remain here. People value the unrivalled accessibility offered by the excellent transport connections, the diverse character of the settlements and their centres, the good access to local services and quality of the countryside. However, socio-economic and environmental changes (such as increased commuting for employment, an aging population and climate change) are calling into question the way our towns function into the future, the viability of our rural areas and our ability to ensure that everyone gets to share in the quality of life that we value.

The environmental pledge considers the type of infrastructure we currently have, the way this has changed over recent years and the challenges we face in balancing our economic and housing growth aspirations with maintaining our environmental quality over the coming years. Our Local Development Framework has to make provision to accommodate 13,400 homes between 2006 and 2026. We relish the challenge and the opportunities that the proposed housing and population growth brings but it is important we are able to protect the countryside that we value, retain our distinctiveness and adapt the way we do things to reflect Climate Change.

### Did you know?

- 84% of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live (Place Survey, 2008)
- Despite being a rural district, over two-thirds of the population live in the three main urban areas of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington
- Approximately 14% of the District lies within the Oxford Green Belt and 8% within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- The District contains 32 scheduled ancient monuments and has a rich built heritage, with approximately 3000 listed buildings and 50 conservation areas.
- The house price to income ratio is 8.8 in Cherwell - higher than national and regional comparators but the lowest in Oxfordshire, except Vale of White Horse
- Household growth is outstripping population growth due to the falling household size in the area – as a result of socio-economic trends such as increasing life expectancy, divorce and partnering later in life.
- During 2007 / 08, 60% of new dwellings were built upon previously developed land and the average density for new dwellings was 47 dwellings per hectare (Cherwell District Council,

## DRAFT VERSION 7

2008).

- The Regional Spatial Strategy requires Cherwell to make provision for 13,400 new homes across Cherwell between 2006 and 2026. The majority of these will be located in Banbury and Bicester.
- Our domestic water use is 10% higher than the national average
- Over 60% of people drive to work, with a further 7% travelling as a passenger in a car.
- The district produced 11.59 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (2006) per capita compared to 8.03 across South East Region
- Cherwell recycles (45%) of household waste, the highest % in Oxfordshire and significantly higher than the UK average of 34.5%. This has increased three-fold since 2003/04.

### 6.1 Our Infrastructure and Environmental Objectives

The quality of the environment is one of the features that the people in Cherwell most value. This relates to both the natural environment and also the historic built environment that defines the character of many of our towns and villages. However, our District is facing challenges at a global and more local level which are challenging the way we look after our environment into the future. We must get more efficient at recycling and reusing waste, reducing our above average carbon emissions and levels of water use. Most notably, the stakeholders we spoke to talked about their concern over accommodating the forecast levels of housing growth and the impact this will have upon the community spirit of our settlements or the provision of our infrastructure and services. The objectives below reflect what you have told us needs to happen to protect our environment and accommodate growth in a sustainable way.

#### **We will:**

1. Cherish the resources that define Cherwell's character and distinctiveness including our natural environment, our built heritage and the vitality of our towns and villages.
2. Mitigate against and adapt to the impacts of climate change including minimising our waste and resource use, combating our carbon emissions and embracing new technologies.
3. Improve accessibility and tackle congestion including a shift in transport methods from our reliance on the private car towards public transport and walking or cycling opportunities.
4. Ensure our social infrastructure grows at the same rate as our communities and current deficiencies in provision are addressed including affordable housing, community buildings, open spaces, cultural and leisure opportunities.



# DRAFT VERSION 7

## 6.2 5 year focus

In this section we will outline our priorities and steps we will take to meet our environmental and infrastructure objectives in the coming five years. The list below reflects the ideas and suggestions we have developed from our consultation to date. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

### **Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review**

- Maintaining the vitality of our town and village centres – as economic cores, service centres and hubs of our community.
- Supporting our towns and villages to be different from each other and maintain the qualities that define their identity. Enabling rural communities to grow and evolve appropriately to support vibrant and dynamic villages.
- Provide and maintain a high quality environment (clean streets, reduced graffiti and link to reducing anti-social behaviour and enhancing a sense of community wellbeing).
- Support communities to prepare a town or parish plan for their area.
- Reduce the overall carbon emissions for the district, aspiring to eventually becoming carbon neutral.
- Supporting farmers and other land managers in protecting our environment and biodiversity.
- Develop existing and new methods of minimising, managing, recycling and reusing waste.
- Decrease the amount of energy and water used in the district, harnessing new technologies and communication methods to encourage personal responsibility.
- Improve accessibility and tackle congestion by supporting a shift from our reliance on the private car towards public transport and walking or cycling.
- Ensure new homes and existing housing are accessible and decent, with increased energy efficiency and a reduction in fuel poverty, in an environment where people want to live and which can respond to their changing life circumstances.
- Deliver more affordable housing.
- Adapt the way we do things to respond to climate change embracing new technologies and applying them to our new developments and infrastructure.
- Prepare a strategic infrastructure plan and use this to understand where the current deficiencies lie and how the provision of infrastructure can be effectively delivered into the future.

## DRAFT VERSION 7

- Adopt the Local Development Framework which sets out how and where we will accommodate growth across the district, as set out in the Cherwell Local Development Scheme.
- Invest in community transport solutions in rural areas.

### 6.3 Local Focus Environment and Infrastructure

We recognise that different areas across the district will have their own priorities and we will identify specific actions to address them. The list below outlines the feedback we have received from our initial consultation. We will finalise the list and targets after the formal consultation period ending in October 2009.

#### Draft Priorities – For Consultation and Review

##### Banbury

- Review and address the transport needs and traffic control for Banbury
- Address the needs of all communities within Banbury to plan for appropriate, affordable and decent housing for everyone.
- Develop Banbury Farmers market

##### Bicester

- Address the deficiencies in community facilities.
- Reduce out commuting and develop innovative ways of reducing its carbon impact.
- Implement the redevelopment proposals for Bicester town centre including bringing forward the environmental improvements programme for Market Square.
- Support town improved transport links
- Bicester to be used as a pilot for exemplary environmental and social practice in managing growth

##### Kidlington

- Directly address the issue of the main road bisecting the village and traffic management.
- Continue to explore the possibility of a new station.
- Explore the use of the canal as an alternative transport resource.
- Provide affordable and appropriate housing development in close consultation with the village community.

##### Rural Areas

- Identify where traffic control is both desirable and beneficial.
- Review community-based and alternative transport options.
- Include rural communities in the plans for developing both housing and commercial development.
- Identify where biodiversity and rural land management have a unique relationship with environmental protection.

## **7. How will we do it? - the leadership pledge**

**By 2030 Cherwell will be characterised by our responsiveness to our changing population and our partnerships will be take a key role in delivering services, fostering community cohesion and managing our resources, directing them to where there is most need. Our local representatives will take an active and vibrant role in representing their communities and bringing about local solutions to local problems. Our public services will be open, honest and accountable with clear lines of communication between the public, private and voluntary sectors who work together to deliver what is needed. We will have exemplary consultation and communications processes, generating and sharing accurate, relevant and intelligent information, and enabling an engaged and inclusive Cherwell that relishes dialogue and debate and listens to everyone's different opinions and experiences.**

Cherwell cannot thrive or address the challenges ahead without clear leadership and accountability for results. Democratic and partnership structures are in place but these can only function if they are embraced. Communities and their representatives need to take some of the responsibility for keeping them vibrant. There is now strong evidence that community leadership lies at the heart of the development and delivery of good and sustainable community strategies.

Our consultation told us we must be clear about who is accountable for the delivery of this strategy. An integral part of accountability is being sure we know what is happening, who is doing it and assessing our progress.

Our role as the Local Strategic Partnership is to ensure that we have the right systems in place to do this and that we have methods of analysing the causes and consequences of progress. We will act promptly when results are disappointing, reassess our priorities regularly and communicate this effectively. It is vital that we all work together to maximise community involvement, use available resources as efficiently as possible and raise our common understanding of the problems and their potential solutions.

This strategy is one of a family of documents. It will sit alongside an analysis of the issues and an evidence base, a leadership framework, the Local Development Framework and an implementation plan. There are also a number of medium term strategies and the Oxfordshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) that will deliver the objectives and priorities contained within the pledges.

Together they will enable us to build effective partnerships and networks and work alongside each other to bring about the change and improvement that we all want to see.

## 8. Thanks and Acknowledgements

As part of the development of this strategy we have held or taken part in a number of events including elected councillors, rural and stakeholders' workshops, sessions with the voluntary sector and the parish liaison group, the Cherwell Skills Summit and a session with community workers in Banbury.

We would like to thank all the people, community groups, councillors, voluntary groups and public agencies that have taken part in developing the strategy so far. Also thanks to those who have invited us to attend their events and the many individuals who have spent time with us, showing us around their areas and telling us about their expectations and aspirations for the future of Cherwell.

ADD A DIAGRAM SHOWING HOW THE CHERWELL SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY LINKS INTO OTHER PLANS AT THE REGIONAL, COUNTY LEVEL AND DISTRICT LEVEL AND PREFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ARRANGMENTS