

To: Cabinets and Executives

Title of report: Oxfordshire Plan 2050: Statement of Community Involvement

Date: 28th February 2022

Report of Philip Wadsworth – Programme Lead of the Oxfordshire Plan

Executive summary and purpose:

This report provides an update on the Oxfordshire Plan Statement of Community Involvement in response to the recent lifting of coronavirus restrictions. The statement sets out how we will consult with people and local organisations in the preparation of this plan.

Once adopted, the Oxfordshire Plan will provide a high-level spatial framework to shape the future planning of the county up to 2050 and will sit alongside Local Plan reviews and Neighbourhood Plans.

Recommendation:

Cabinets and executives are asked to approve the adoption of the revised Oxfordshire Plan Statement of Community Involvement, and to note that the statement will be kept under regular review as the project continues.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Statement of Community Involvement

1 Introduction and background

1.1 This report seeks approval to adopt the revised Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Statement of Community Involvement following the lifting of the coronavirus restrictions. It also provides an update on the recent consultation and the next steps.

1.2 The Statement of Community Involvement (see appendix 1) outlines how the community and stakeholders will be consulted during the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan.

1.3 The Oxfordshire Plan is a joint statutory spatial 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. These authorities have made a commitment as part of the housing and growth deal agreement with government to prepare the Oxfordshire Plan on a joint basis to guide the future planning and development of the county up to 2050. Once adopted, the Oxfordshire Plan will form part of the development plan of each authority and will be an important material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

1.4 The Oxfordshire Plan will provide a positive and high-level planning framework to support the delivery of new homes, economic development and associated infrastructure across Oxfordshire, with a bold vision 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 wildlife and environment up to 2050.

1.5 The Oxfordshire Plan will build on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's strategic vision (further details are provided at <https://futureoxfordshirepartnership.org>) and the objectives of other relevant plans and strategies at the county level, including the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy and Oxfordshire Transport and Connectivity Plan. A flow diagram summarising the relationship between the Oxfordshire Plan and other relevant plans and strategies, such as Local Plans, is attached at appendix 1 in the draft Statement of Community Involvement. The Oxfordshire Plan, once adopted, will guide and inform the preparation of the Local Plan reviews and other development plan documents, where relevant.

1.6 Since July 2021, much progress has been made on the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan, including a further round of public consultation (regulation 18, part 2) and the gathering of supporting evidence. The recent public consultation (July–October 2021) generated significant interest from a wide range of individuals and organisations. We received a total of 3723 individual responses to the consultation, from around 422 individuals and organisations, including statutory consultees, district councils, neighbouring authorities, town and parish councils, major employers, infrastructure providers, developers, landowners and government agencies.

1.7 We are in the process of analysing the responses to the recent consultation (regulation 18, part 2) on the emerging plan. Officers across the local planning authorities are still reflecting on the feedback from the recent scrutiny committee meetings on the key messages from the regulation 18 (part 2) consultation and will report on the detailed findings and next steps in due course.

1.8 Officers are also reviewing the Oxfordshire Plan work programme in the context of the feedback from the recent consultation and discussions with the government on the timings of future stages. This includes consideration of the inter-relationships between the Oxfordshire Plan and Local Plan reviews and other relevant supporting strategies (e.g. Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy). That detail must be worked through to help inform the next stages of the Oxfordshire Plan process, including the timetable through to adoption, and we will engage with the government (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities).

2 Statement of Community Involvement – its role and purpose

2.1 The revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is outlined in appendix 1. It replaces the previous version of the statement, adopted in July 2021.

2.2 This statement sets out Oxfordshire's approach to the effective and meaningful engagement of people and organisations during the next stages of plan preparation. In turn, it will help to ensure that the emerging policies and proposals of the Oxfordshire Plan reflect the needs, aspirations and concerns of residents and businesses across Oxfordshire.

2.3 The statement has been updated to reflect the government's recent lifting of the coronavirus restrictions (as set out in legislation) and the increased use of social media and other digital engagement tools in the process of preparing the Oxfordshire Plan. 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.

2.4 Please note: the attached statement is specific to the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Local planning authorities in Oxfordshire will publish their own individual SCIs related to the production of their local plan reviews and other relevant development plan documents.

2.5 This statement also outlines the stages of the Oxfordshire Plan preparation process, including the 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).

3 Legal implications

3.1 The Oxfordshire Plan must be prepared in accordance with the procedures and processes set out in the latest Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)². It must also meet the requirements of the duty to cooperate set out in the Localism Act (2011) and the tests of soundness set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Failure to demonstrate compliance with the requirements set out in the legislation would render the plan incapable of adoption.

3.2 Subject to the approval of the five Oxfordshire authorities, the revised SCI will be made publicly available on the Oxfordshire Plan website at <https://oxfordshireplan.org>.

4 Financial implications

4.1 The next stages of the plan process may incur small additional costs to the overall plan budget, in respect of publicity, marketing, consolidation of web-based information, printing and commissioning of consultation documents. However, efficiency savings can be achieved through the more effective use of digital engagement tools, twin-tracked consultations and more efficient deployment of resources. So overall the financial implications of approving this revised Statement of Community Involvement are neutral.

5 Risks

5.1 The main risk associated with not proceeding with publishing the updated SCI is that the Oxfordshire Plan process could be challenged for not complying with appropriate regulations. Officers have limited control over this risk. Any risks will be managed as part of the operational risk register process escalating as and when necessary.

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² Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.