The Planning Inspectorate

Report to South Oxfordshire District Council

by Jonathan Bore MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Date: 27 November 2020

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

(as amended)

Section 20

Report on the Examination of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2034

The Plan was submitted for examination on 29 March 2019

The examination hearings were held between 14 July 2020 and 7 August 2020

File Ref: PINS/Q3115/429/6

Contents

Abbreviations used in this report

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
dpa	Dwellings per annum
MM	Main modification
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
OAN	Objectively assessed need
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Assessment
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

Non-Technical Summary

This report concludes that the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2034 provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the District, provided that a number of main modifications (MMs) are made to it. South Oxfordshire District Council has specifically requested that I recommend any main modifications necessary to enable the Plan to be adopted.

Following the hearings, the Council prepared schedules of the proposed modifications and carried out sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment of them. The main modifications were subject to public consultation over a six-week period. In some cases, I have amended their detailed wording and added consequential modifications where necessary. I have recommended their inclusion in the Plan after considering the sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment and all the representations made in response to consultation on them.

The Main Modifications can be summarised as follows:

- A change in the plan's end date from 2034 to 2035, with consequent changes in the delivery requirements for housing, employment and other forms of development;
- A range of modifications throughout the plan to strengthen its contribution to tackling climate change, including a new policy on carbon reduction;
- The introduction of a stepped housing trajectory to reflect past and realistic future delivery rates;
- The inclusion of development principles for Didcot Garden Town and for Berinsfield Garden Village;
- Changes throughout the plan to policies governing density, to ensure that development is sensitive to local circumstances and needs;
- A requirement for compensatory improvements to offset the impact of removing land from the Green Belt;
- A change to inset an additional area from the Green Belt at Culham Science Centre;
- Requirements for biodiversity net gain, high-quality walking and cycling routes and public transport facilities;
- Clarification as to where residential development may take place, including entry level housing, rural exception sites, and specialist accommodation for older people, and clarification as to the circumstances under which affordable housing will be sought;
- Changes to the policy framework for the Market Towns, to clarify that they may deliver more homes in certain circumstances than the residual requirement;
- Changes to employment delivery requirements and the removal of an unnecessary and onerous policy requiring community employment plans;
- Provision to recover and recycle external infrastructure funding;
- The insertion of urban design principles;
- Changes resulting from the introduction of Classes E, F.1 and F.2 of the Use Classes Order, affecting town centre and community uses;
- Modifications to bring the plan's heritage policies into line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);

- A number of other modifications to ensure that the plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy and contains up-to-date figures.

Introduction

1. This report contains my assessment of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan in terms of Section 20(5) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). It considers first whether the Plan's preparation has complied with the duty to co-operate. It then considers whether the Plan is compliant with the legal requirements and whether it is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (paragraph 35) makes it clear that in order to be sound, a Local Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

2. The starting point for the examination is the assumption that the local planning authority has submitted what it considers to be a sound plan. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2034, submitted on 29 March 2019, is the basis for my examination. It is the same document that was published for consultation on 7 January 2019.

3. **When adopted, the Plan will become the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035** and will guide development and infrastructure to that date. **MM1** extends the end date of the Plan to 2035 so that it covers a period of about 15 years, to accord with Paragraph 22 of the NPPF. There are consequent changes throughout the Plan. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 will replace the 2012 Core Strategy (including the "saved" policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011).

Main Modifications

4. In accordance with section 20(7C) of the 2004 Act, the Council requested that I should recommend any main modifications necessary to rectify matters that make the Plan unsound and thus incapable of being adopted. My report explains why the recommended main modifications are necessary. These are referenced in bold in the report in the form **MM1, MM2** etc, and are set out in full in the Appendix.

5. Following the examination hearings, the Council prepared a schedule of proposed main modifications and carried out sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment of them. The schedule was subject to public consultation for six weeks. I have taken account of the consultation responses in coming to my conclusions in this report, and in this light I have made some amendments to the detailed wording of the main modifications and added consequential modifications where these are necessary for consistency or clarity. None of the amendments significantly alters the content of the modifications as published for consultation or undermines the participatory processes, sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment that have been undertaken. Where necessary I have highlighted these amendments in the report.

Policies Map

6. The Council must maintain an adopted policies map which illustrates geographically the application of the policies in the adopted development plan. When submitting a local plan for examination, the Council is required to provide a submission policies map showing the changes to the adopted policies map that would result from the proposals in the submitted local plan. In this case, the submission policies map comprises the set of plans identified as Documents CSD02 and CSD02.1, together with the Strategic Allocation Maps, the Site Allocations, the Green Belt Proposed Changes, the South Oxfordshire District Council Safeguarding Maps, and Town Centre Boundaries and Primary Shopping Frontages which are set out in Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 13 of the Plan respectively.

7. The policies map is not defined in statute as a development plan document, so I do not have the power to recommend main modifications to it. However, certain of the published main modifications to the Plan's policies require corresponding changes to the policies map and there are some instances where the geographic illustration of policies on the policies map is not justified and changes to the policies map are needed to ensure that the relevant policies are effective.

8. These further changes to the policies map were published for consultation alongside the main modifications in the document entitled "Schedule of Policies Map Changes, September 2020".

9. When the Plan is adopted, in order to comply with the legislation and give effect to the Plan's policies, the Council will need to update the adopted policies map to include all the changes proposed in Documents CSD02 and CSD02.1 and Appendices 2 to 5 and 13 of the Plan, together with the further changes published alongside the main modifications in the "Schedule of Policies Map Changes, September 2020".

Context of the Plan

10. South Oxfordshire is one of five district councils in Oxfordshire. The District borders the northern, eastern and southern sides of Oxford and extends south eastwards as far as the northern fringes of Reading, taking in a substantial part of the Oxford Green Belt and the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and a smaller area of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The District contains the attractive and thriving Market Towns of Wallingford, Thame and Henley-on-Thames, the expanding Garden Town of Didcot, a range of different villages, and much pleasant open countryside. However, there are many issues. South Oxfordshire, the City of Oxford, and the County of Oxfordshire have a strong and growing economy, but housing is hard for many to afford; the District has significant levels of affordable housing need; neighbouring Oxford is unable to accommodate all its own housing need within its boundaries; and there are some significant infrastructure issues to address.

11. The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal is an integrated approach to the County's challenges, with the aim of realising the potential of its knowledge economy and delivering necessary housing, including affordable housing, transport infrastructure and social infrastructure. The Oxfordshire district councils together with the County Council and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Board are signatories to the Deal, which was announced in the 2017 Autumn Budget Statement. Formal approval by all six authorities and the Local Enterprise Board was confirmed by letter to the Secretary of State on 28 February 2018. Together with the accompanying Delivery Plan, the Deal is intended to support Oxfordshire's ambition to plan and support the delivery of 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031. In addition to the Deal, Oxfordshire County Council has been successful in bidding for funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund to support various transport schemes. A further commitment for Oxfordshire in the Deal is the development of an Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan which will build upon the current range of plans, including the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, and will set the strategic direction for planning to 2050. The submitted Plan which forms the subject of this report takes into account the objectives of the Housing and Growth Deal and this is discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

12. The Local Plan was submitted for examination on 29 March 2019, but on 3 October 2019, the Council's Cabinet decided to recommend withdrawing it. Following that decision, on 9 October 2019, the Secretary of State issued a holding direction under s21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 directing the Council not to take any step in connection with the adoption of the plan. This prevented the Council from either withdrawing the plan or responding to the three sets of comments and questions which I had previously put to it. This remained the position until 3 March 2020, when the Secretary of State withdrew the holding direction and issued new directions to the local planning authority under s27(2)(b) of the 2004 Act. These included a direction to progress the Plan through examination and adoption by December 2020. The Council acted swiftly by providing responses to my comments and questions in April and May 2020 and by helping to facilitate the virtual hearings in July and August 2020.

13. The Secretary of State's powers of direction in S27(2)(b) of the 2004 Act apply to the local planning authority, but not to the Inspector or the examination. Although I am appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the plan, the examination is independent, as established under s20 of the Act. Consequently, whilst I have sought in everyone's interest to conduct the examination in an efficient manner, the Secretary of State's Direction has had no influence over the examination's conduct, its timescale, or my assessment of, or conclusions on, the legal compliance and soundness of the Plan.

14. The examination into the submitted Plan took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and several participants raised the question of whether the pandemic had rendered the plan out of date. I did not spend time on this subject at the examination hearings because any discussion could only have been speculative. It is observable that the pandemic has reinforced pre-existing trends towards home working, internet shopping and outdoor exercise. But a greater propensity for home working in the future would not obviate the need for everyone to have a decent home; the evidence base for

the Plan's retail and town centre policies has taken into account internet shopping trends; and the Plan places considerable importance on green infrastructure and open space and recreation. The spatial strategy remains sound and valid: some jobs can be managed substantially from home but many people will still need to travel to work, and a spatial strategy based on a dispersal model would have significant implications for the market towns, villages and countryside and the infrastructure that serves them. Whether the trends observable during the pandemic will continue, whether there will be a reversion to previous conditions, or whether other consequences might ensue, is simply not known at present, and the pandemic does not provide any justification for changing the Plan or halting its adoption. The appropriate response to this issue will be through the monitoring process.

15. Finally, the Council declared a climate emergency after the Plan was submitted for examination. This report therefore takes into account the great importance placed by the Council on the issue of climate change. Main modifications are recommended throughout the plan to address this issue, including a completely new policy seeking low carbon and renewable energy in new development, to ensure that the Plan remains robust in the future and promotes sustainable development.

Public Sector Equality Duty

16. I have had due regard to the aims expressed in S149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. This has included my consideration of several matters during the examination including, notably, the provision of a range of housing options to cater for the housing needs of all the community, for example, the provision of traveller sites to meet needs, affordable housing, self-build homes, starter homes, accessible and adaptable housing and the provision of specialist housing for older people. I have considered and taken into account the Equality and Human Rights Impact Check produced by the Council in connection with the submitted Plan (Document CSD07).

17. I have also had regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in connection with the operation of the examination hearings. The examination included the first ever complete set of virtual local plan hearings, conducted remotely over 4 weeks from 14 July to 7 August 2020 and live streamed on YouTube. Before the hearings took place, reservations were expressed by some parties about whether virtual hearings would be fair and inclusive. Two of the key letters of concern (Documents PSD28 and PSD29), and my responses (Documents IC07 and IC08), were included as examination documents and made available on the examination website so that others with similar concerns could have regard to them. In practice there was no evidence that any party was disadvantaged by the holding of virtual hearings compared with physical hearings.

Assessment of Duty to Co-operate

18. Section 20(5)(c) of the 2004 Act requires that I consider whether the Council complied with any duty imposed on it by section 33A in respect of the Plan's preparation.

19. South Oxfordshire has worked actively and constructively with its neighbouring authorities and the County Council, other prescribed bodies, and service and infrastructure providers during the preparation of the Plan. Activities have included meetings, the preparation of joint evidence, the exchange of written correspondence and the production of statements of common ground. Among other things the work has informed the Council's approach to infrastructure provision and the apportionment of Oxford's unmet housing needs. This work sits within the context of a long history of close co-operation between the Oxfordshire authorities, including the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The extensive co-operation that the Council has undertaken is detailed in its March 2019 Statement of Compliance (Document CSD12).

20. I am satisfied that where necessary the Council has engaged constructively, actively and on an on-going basis in the preparation of the Plan and that the duty to co-operate has therefore been met.

Consultation

21. Consultation took place in several stages. Earlier stages, under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, included Issues and Scope (June 2014), Refined Options (February 2015), Preferred Options (June 2016) and Second Preferred Options (March 2017). A version of the plan was produced for Regulation 19 consultation, which took place from 11 October to 22 November 2017 with an extension of time to 30 November. That version was not submitted for examination, and the Council subsequently treated that consultation round as another phase of Regulation 18 consultation. A second finalised version of the plan was published for Regulation 19 consultation, which took place from 7 January to 18 February 2019 and this was the plan that was submitted for examination.

22. The submitted Plan did not start from the beginning again, but built on previous work, including the many consultations undertaken under Regulation 18 and the consultation associated with the 2017 plan. Whilst some of its policies and site allocations were different from the 2017 plan, the submitted Plan was subject to very extensive consultation under Regulation 19, as detailed in paragraphs 2.28 to 2.36 of the Council's Regulation 22 Statement (Document CSD11); in total, 17,136 formal representations were received from 2,561 respondents.

23. Consultation on the Plan and the main modifications was carried out in compliance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The Council has fully met the regulatory requirements for consultation.

Assessment of Other Aspects of Legal Compliance

24. The Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme.

25. The Council carried out a sustainability appraisal of the Plan, prepared a report of the findings of the appraisal, and published the report along with the plan and other submission documents under regulation 19 of the Town and Country

Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The appraisal was updated to assess the main modifications.

26. The Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment (document CSD05.2, March 2019) sets out that a full assessment has been undertaken and concludes that the Plan is not likely to lead to adverse effects on the integrity of any European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. The Addendum to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (September 2020) comes to the same conclusion in respect of the Plan, taking into account the main modifications.

27. The Development Plan, taken as a whole, includes policies to address the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area.

28. The Development Plan, taken as a whole, includes policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. Addressing climate change is one of the strategic objectives of the Plan, and the issue has been taken into account in the Plan's spatial strategy, its strategic allocations, and in policies towards carbon reduction and renewable energy, which have been further strengthened through a number of the main modifications.

29. The Plan complies with all other relevant legal requirements, including in the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations.

Assessment of Soundness

Main Issues

30. Taking account of all the representations, the written evidence and the discussions that took place at the examination hearings, I have identified 8 main issues upon which the soundness of this plan depends. This report deals with these main issues. It does not respond to every point or issue raised by representors. Nor does it refer to every policy, policy criterion or allocation in the Plan.[1]

31. The issue of the housing requirement will be addressed first to set the scene for the assessment of the spatial strategy and site allocations which follow. The report will then address other aspects of housing, infrastructure and viability, employment and business, and development management issues.

Issue 1 – Whether the Plan's housing requirement is soundly based

The calculation of the housing requirement

32. Policy STRAT2 of the submitted plan contains a total housing requirement of 22,775 homes, consisting of 17,825 homes for South Oxfordshire at a rate of 775 dwellings per annum (dpa) over the plan period from 2011 to 2034, and an additional 4,950 homes to meet Oxford City's unmet housing needs. Changing the end date of the plan to 31 March 2035 (see paragraph 3 and MM1), but retaining the same annual delivery rate for South Oxfordshire and the same component for Oxford City, gives a total housing requirement of 23,550 homes over the revised plan period, and this is included in **MM5**.

33. The figure of 775 dpa is derived from the 2014 Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (documents HOU05 & HOU05.1) and is higher than that indicated by the standard method, which is 627 dpa using 2014-based household projections.[2] In exceptional circumstances the NPPF allows for an alternative approach to the standard method which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals. Planning Practice Guidance on housing and economic development needs assessments, paragraph 010, lists circumstances where it might be appropriate to plan for a higher housing need figure than the standard method indicates. These include:

    - growth strategies for the area that are likely to be deliverable, for example where funding is in place to promote and facilitate additional growth (eg Housing Deals);

[1] The main modifications introduce and delete policies and criteria, which will affect numbering. For simplicity, this report aims as far as possible to refer to the original policy and criteria numbering from the submitted Plan. Any re-numbering of policies and criteria necessitated by the main modifications is a matter for the Council.

[2] The standard method calculation is explained in the Planning Practice Guidance chapter "Housing and economic development needs assessments".

- strategic infrastructure improvements that are likely to drive an increase in the homes needed locally; or

- an authority agreeing to take on unmet need from neighbouring authorities, as set out in a statement of common ground.

34. Planning Practice Guidance also states that there may occasionally be situations where previous levels of housing delivery in an area, or previous assessments of need are significantly greater than the outcome from the standard method, and authorities should take these into account.

35. All the above situations apply in the case of South Oxfordshire.

36. The SHMA looked closely at housing affordability, affordable housing need and economic growth. It concluded that, across Oxfordshire, between 4,678 and 5,328 dwellings per annum were required between 2011 and 2031 to support committed economic growth, and to support delivery of affordable housing and an improvement in the affordability of housing over time. This led to the Growth Deal's ambition of 100,000 homes, and the corresponding annual housing need figures for South Oxfordshire were in the range of 725 to 825 dpa, with the Plan's basic housing need figure of 775 dpa being based on the mid-point of this range (not including the allowance for Oxford's unmet needs).

37. The 2018 household projections for the District show lower household growth than the projections referred to in the SHMA. This has led to suggestions that the housing need figure for South Oxfordshire should be revised downwards. However, household projections are not predictions; nor are they assessments of housing need. The 2014 SHMA remains the most recent full assessment of need. It is a very detailed study and was produced cooperatively by, and agreed between, the Oxfordshire authorities. All the other Oxfordshire authorities consider the SHMA still to be the most relevant assessment of housing need, and its assessment underpins their local plan housing requirements.

38. Projections are revised every two years and can change considerably each time, but the principal housing and economic factors that were identified by the SHMA and which underlie both the Growth Deal and the Plan's housing need figure have remained constant. These factors include the strength of the Oxfordshire economic base and problems of housing affordability. The area remains of key economic importance, and the success of its economy generates substantial housing need which, combined with limited supply, means that housing is difficult to access at an affordable price. This then acts as a brake on economic growth and a driver of longer commuting patterns, as people seek out cheaper places to live further from the city. The current median property price to median earnings ratio in South Oxfordshire is 11.6 whereas in 1997 it was 5.3. This has severely impaired the ability of new householders or those who wish to move out of the rented sector to afford housing. It represents a very serious situation in South Oxfordshire and housing delivery rates have, until very recently, been much too low to address the problem. There is also an undersupply of affordable housing within the definition in the National Planning Policy Framework.

39. The proposed delivery level in the Plan will help to address the serious issue of market housing costs and this, combined with Policy H9 which seeks 40% affordable housing (50% adjacent to Oxford – see below), which has been viability tested, will go a substantial way towards meeting the affordable housing needs of the District. Housing delivery in the last two years for which figures are available demonstrate that it is possible to deliver at this rate: there were 936 completions in 2017/18 and 1,361 in 2018/19. This level of delivery has been achieved partly as a result of strategic growth at Didcot and neighbourhood plan allocations and suggests that the growth requirement of 2.4% of housing stock per annum implied by the housing requirement appears realistic. Strategic infrastructure improvements are planned which will facilitate housing delivery.

40. The Plan makes provision for 4,950 additional homes which will contribute towards meeting the City of Oxford's large unmet housing need. This apportionment has been agreed between the Oxfordshire authorities, and is consistent with the figures and objectives of the recently-adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036. The Plan also seeks 50% affordable housing on the site allocations adjacent to Oxford, a similar proportion to that sought by the Oxford Local Plan. For effectiveness, a new delivery period of 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2035 is specified by MM5 to meet Oxford's need. This is different from the consultation version of MM5 which inadvertently omitted the delivery period.

41. Oxford's housing need, including its very significant need for affordable housing, was assessed in detail through a 2018 Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) update to the 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA and was thoroughly examined in the recent Oxford Local Plan examination. Whilst household projections have changed since 2014, the Oxford Local Plan Inspectors' report, for example paragraphs 19, 20, 24 and 38, makes it clear that the figure of 1,400 dpa for Oxford, derived from the 2018 OAN Update and referred to in the Oxford Local Plan, is an up to date housing need figure which relates to a current and persistent crisis of affordable housing need in the city. It remains completely relevant.

42. The capacity of Oxford to provide for these needs was thoroughly scrutinised during the Oxford Local Plan process as discussed in paragraphs 41 to 43 of the Oxford City Inspectors' report (PSD33), and the figure of unmet need that was arrived at was fully evidence-based. It is important to recognise that Oxford's revised capacity-based figure of 10,884 homes, compared with the figure of 8,620 homes as originally included in its submitted plan, does not mean that there is scope to reduce the figure of 4,950 homes provided within South Oxfordshire to meet Oxford's unmet housing needs. When the apportionment of 4,950 homes was agreed, the capacity of Oxford was assumed to be 10,000 dwellings out of a total housing need of 28,000 homes, and Oxford City also had an additional apportionment of 550 homes. It is indicated in paragraph 3.10 of the Oxford Local Plan 2036, and it is clear from paragraph 3.11 of that plan that South Oxfordshire's full agreed complement is required to make progress in meeting those needs.

43. It has been argued that the plan's housing requirement is excessive because it has been driven by economic growth objectives. But economic growth in the Oxford region arises because of the area's social, economic and educational characteristics and its location, and it reflects many independent individual and

business decisions. It needs to be taken into account when considering the housing requirement. The NPPF states that the planning system should ensure that land is available to support growth, innovation and improved productivity. As well as ensuring that everyone has a decent home, economic growth should not be hampered because of a shortage of housing, a very expensive housing market, and inadequate infrastructure. These are some of the factors that lie behind the Oxfordshire Growth Deal. The Plan is consistent with the Oxfordshire Growth Deal (see paragraph 11 of this report), the NPPF, and with other local plans in Oxfordshire.

44. However, a higher housing requirement, at the upper end of the SHMA range, is not justified on the evidence. The Plan plays an adequate part in meeting the aims of the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, especially when overall delivery potential is considered, a matter dealt with in Issue 4. Over the plan period the delivery potential is 30,056 dwellings, which represents headroom of around 27% above the requirement of 23,550. This not only represents an adequate contingency buffer; it also demonstrates clear support for the Growth Deal's objectives of 100,000 homes in Oxfordshire by 2031 and continuing adequate levels of delivery until the end of the plan period. The importance of this contingency buffer is discussed in more detail in Issue 4 in relation to housing supply, and in Issue 2 in connection with Green Belt considerations.

Whether the housing requirement should be reduced to take into account Green Belt and environmental issues

45. It has been suggested that the District's Green Belt, heritage assets, biodiversity, landscape, infrastructure and the Council's declared climate emergency are reasons to reduce the housing requirement.

46. Regarding Green Belt, the assessment below in Issue 2 demonstrates that there is no sound alternative means of reducing the amount of land taken from the Green Belt whilst providing for the housing requirement in sustainable locations near to where the need arises. If the housing requirement were reduced, the ability to provide homes in logical and sustainable locations would be impaired, with severely negative consequences for both the District and neighbouring Oxford, in terms of housing affordability and economic growth and longer journey patterns. At the same time, the analysis of site allocation policies in Issue 3 demonstrates that, owing to the characteristics of the chosen sites and their ability to provide green infrastructure and defensible boundaries, the impact on the Green Belt of their release would be moderate. This report concludes that there are exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt. The existence of Green Belt does not lead to the conclusion that the housing requirement should be reduced.

47. As regards heritage, the March 2019 Heritage Impact Assessment (Document BHE03.1) referred to the potential for strategic sites to have an impact upon heritage assets, highlighted areas within each strategic site where impact to heritage assets could occur, and suggested mitigation measures where there was sufficient information. In other locations the Impact Assessment recommended further investigation. It will clearly be necessary for

masterplans and site layouts to take into account the protection of heritage assets and their settings, and it will be important to ensure that growth at the towns and villages respects their historic and local character. The evidence submitted for each of the strategic sites demonstrates that it is possible to protect heritage assets and their settings (including the overall setting of historic Oxford), and there is no reason to expect that development coming forward elsewhere, for example in the market towns, would harm heritage assets or their settings. Policies ENV6 to ENV10 provide strong protection for heritage assets. Taking all these factors into account, there is no reason to reduce the Plan's overall housing requirement on account of the existence of heritage assets.

48. Regarding biodiversity, there are four Special Areas of Conservation that lie wholly or partially within the District and a number of others within 17km of the District's boundary, as well as the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. The Habitat Regulations Assessment and Update (CSD05.2) concluded that the Plan is not likely to lead to adverse effects on the integrity of any Special Area of Conservation or the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. As regards Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and local wildlife designations, it will be necessary for masterplans to ensure that their integrity is not harmed; for example, the masterplan for STRAT13: Land North of Bayswater Brook will need to protect the integrity of the Sydlings Copse and College Pond SSSI (see Issue 3). But the submitted evidence does not show that the integrity of SSSIs and wildlife designations will be harmed, and there are no grounds for reducing the housing requirement because of the presence of these designations. The potential for development to remove biological material and sever biological corridors is acknowledged, but the plan contains policies to protect biodiversity and it seeks biodiversity net gain (Policies ENV2 and ENV3).

49. In respect of landscape, the character of the land allocated for the strategic sites is discussed in Issues 2 and 3. Most of the sites do have value as open countryside, and some are crossed or bounded by rights of way, but their landscape is not special or remarkable enough to provide justification for reducing the overall housing requirement. There is no reason why meeting the housing requirement should adversely affect the District's two AONBs. They are not touched by the strategic allocations; it is possible that there may be views of some of the allocations from them, but not to the extent that their attractiveness or character would be harmed. The Plan's provision for growth at the market towns in Policy H3 as modified by **MM25** (see Issue 3) is proportionate and there is no evidence that growth at the scale envisaged would harm the AONBs. In any case, additional development anywhere within the plan area would still need to comply with Policy ENV1 which protects the AONBs, the landscape and the countryside.

50. Infrastructure is considered under Issue 5. The Plan includes infrastructure improvements including those enabled by the Housing Infrastructure Fund for the wider Didcot Garden Town area. The strategic allocation policies contain a number of infrastructure requirements designed to mitigate the impact of development. There is no justification for reducing the housing requirement because of infrastructure constraints.

51. The Council has declared a climate emergency, but there is nothing in national policy, and no convincing evidence, to indicate that people's housing needs should go unmet in order to mitigate the effects of human activity on climate, or that the two objectives are mutually unachievable. Indeed, such an approach would be directly contrary to the social objective of sustainable development set out in paragraph 8(b) of the NPPF. Moreover, it would not meet the accepted definition of sustainable development, set out in Resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly, and summarised in paragraph 7 of the NPPF, because it would fail to meet the housing needs of future generations. The Council's declaration of a climate emergency, and indeed the general issue of the relationship between human activity and climate, do not justify any reduction in the housing requirement in the Plan. The Plan as modified includes a number of measures designed to address climate issues effectively which are discussed throughout this report.

52. None of the above matters, individually or cumulatively, are so significant that they justify a reduction in the housing requirement. A lower housing requirement would mean that local housing needs would not be met, housing affordability would not be adequately addressed, and housing impediments to successful economic growth, including limited housing availability and high housing costs, would not be tackled. It would also mean that the plan would be inconsistent with the range of other adopted plans in Oxfordshire, and would not satisfactorily address Oxford City's unmet housing needs. It would not support the national policy objective to boost the supply of housing by ensuring that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed.

Whether the housing trajectory is sound

53. Policy STRAT2 sets out the submitted Plan's housing requirement. The extension of the plan period to 2035 by MM1 (see paragraph 3 of this report) will require a modification to STRAT2. In addition, the trajectory needs to be adjusted to take into account the realities of housing delivery, which in the earlier years of the plan period was at a lower level than 775 dpa, before rising sharply in 2017/18 and 2018/19. The need to catch up, added to the requirement for 4,950 homes to meet Oxford's unmet needs from 2021 to 2036, would require a steep step up in the annual housing requirement from the date of the plan's adoption. This would be difficult to achieve because a substantial amount of housing is expected to be delivered on the strategic sites, which have longer lead-in times. It is therefore necessary to provide for a revised and realistic housing trajectory, as well as making an adjustment for the extension of the plan period.

54. **MM5** therefore modifies STRAT2 and establishes a new housing requirement for the plan of a minimum of 18,600 dwellings between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2035, together with an additional 4,950 homes to address Oxford's unmet housing need, resulting in a total housing requirement for the new plan period of 23,550 homes. MM5 also introduces a stepped housing requirement as follows:

    - 2011/12 to 2025/26: 900 homes per annum
    - 2026/27 to 2031/32: 1,120 homes per annum

- 2032/33 to 2034/35: 1,110 homes per annum.

55. This represents a realistic trajectory for the delivery of the housing requirement over the plan period. The period for delivering homes to meet Oxford's unmet housing need is extended from 2031 to 2035 but this is not a significant issue, partly for the obvious reason that homes are not assigned to either Oxford or South Oxfordshire and are capable of meeting the needs of either, and partly because Oxford City's plan, including its quantification of unmet housing need, extends to 2036 in any case. The housing trajectory as modified by MM5 is sound.

Conclusion on Issue 1

56. The Plan's housing requirement and the annual figures as set out in STRAT2, subject to MM1 and MM5, are fully justified and sound. The Green Belt and environmental issues discussed later in this report do not justify reducing this figure; nor are there sound reasons to increase it.

Issue 2 – Whether the Plan's spatial strategy is appropriate, having regard to the need to accommodate necessary growth, promote sustainable patterns of development and protect the Green Belt

Introduction

57. The spatial strategy must be considered in the context of the housing requirement, which is appraised above in Issue 1, as well as the District's other development needs, discussed later. There is a need to address the current serious position regarding housing affordability, deliver enough affordable homes, provide for a significant proportion of Oxford's unmet housing needs, and ensure that the area's growing economy is served by enough homes. Matters relating specifically to the strategic allocations and the towns and villages are discussed in Issue 3.

The evolution of the spatial strategy, and the selection of strategic sites

58. The evolution of the spatial strategy is described in the Council's Topic Paper on the subject, document TOP04, and will not be discussed in detail here. It is evident that the process has been thorough and lengthy, and the strategy finally decided upon was the result of several years of consideration and discussion. Document TOP04 demonstrates that a range of potential options was considered, and that the spatial strategy was refined over a number of iterations through the consultation process, and is a blend of the different options.

59. The spatial strategy aims to fulfil three key objectives:

- the Plan's housing provision includes some 4,950 homes to meet Oxford's unmet housing needs which are intended to be delivered on sites adjacent to Oxford (see Issue 1);

- the Plan aims to deliver homes and employment land within the area known as Science Vale to meet housing need and support the strong

economy of that area (but takes a moderate approach towards new allocations in Didcot for reasons discussed below); and

- the plan aims to deliver homes and employment land on sites which are partly previously developed.

60. The spatial strategy also includes proportionate roles for the market towns of Wallingford, Henley-on-Thames and Thame, and different categories of village.

61. In evolving the spatial strategy, the Council has considered all the options for development in the above locations, together with the larger villages, the edge of Reading and a free-standing settlement related to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The strategy that was been finally selected has innate logic and integrity. It seeks to fulfil important public objectives in delivering development to meet identified needs in a sustainable manner.

62. The strategy does however involve the release of land from the Green Belt and this matter is discussed further below.

63. The selection of the strategic allocations is fully documented in the Strategic Site Assessment Background Paper (documents TOP06 and TOP06.1) and the Sustainability Appraisal (document CSD04.2 and CSD04.3) and it is not necessary to repeat it in detail in this report.

64. The Assessment focused on sites capable of delivering more than about 500 homes. This was a reasonable threshold, set comparatively low. The selected strategic sites are all considerably larger than this; they are of a size that can support infrastructure improvements and social and community facilities such as retail and service uses and schools. Given the scale of the housing requirement, a spatial strategy which placed reliance on smaller sites would require many more sites to be identified and it would be more difficult for them individually to support beneficial transport or social and community infrastructure. In any case, within the context of overall housing delivery, there is an adequate supply of smaller sites (see Issue 4).

65. Potential strategic sites were not assessed if they were within the areas of made or significantly progressed neighbourhood plans. It is reasonable for the Council to have taken this approach, partly because it wishes to foster the spirit of localism and therefore places much reliance on housing delivery through neighbourhood plans, and partly because it is consistent with the strategy of taking a proportionate approach to housing in existing towns and villages. The Council did not want the local plan to duplicate or override work that had been, or could be, undertaken by a neighbourhood plan. There is no reason why a neighbourhood plan cannot allocate a larger site should it be required to meet housing requirements.

66. A further criterion was that, as regards new standalone settlements (as opposed to urban extensions to Oxford), the sites should accord with the plan's emerging spatial strategy. This led to the rejection of some sites, but it is quite clear from the evidence base that the spatial strategy evolved alongside the site assessment process as part of an iterative process, and that work on both had been going on from 2014 until the finalisation of the submitted plan. It therefore appears very unlikely that suitable sites will have

been rejected through a premature choice of spatial strategy, or that a more effective spatial strategy would have evolved through the inclusion of such sites.

67. Fifteen sites were identified as potential reasonable strategic housing allocations; these included 4 sites identified as strategic allocations in the October 2017 publication version of the plan, 6 sites that had previously been considered but had not been progressed, and 5 sites submitted through the local plan process up to the end of the 2017 Regulation 19 consultation. Sites were thoroughly assessed by means of a range of studies and through consultation with statutory bodies, and a separate sustainability appraisal assessed each of the potential sites.

68. Nine sites were subject to detailed appraisal, and a number of development scenarios (combinations of allocations) were tested from the perspective of housing delivery. It was considered that sites on the edge of Reading outside the Green Belt would not deliver against the objectives of the spatial strategy (see above) and sites at North Weston and Harrington would create a higher demand for movement off site. In addition, the approach to development set out in paragraph 137 of the NPPF was carried out to consider fully whether land outside the Green Belt should be developed before releasing sites from the Green Belt. Excluding Green Belt sites from the potential allocations would have resulted in a large shortfall against the housing requirement, and the non-Green Belt sites had sustainability or delivery issues.

69. The eventual outcome of the evaluation and sustainability appraisal showed that Grenoble Road, Berinsfield, Wheatley Campus, Culham, Northfield, Chalgrove and Lower Elsfield/Wick Farm (Land north of Bayswater Brook) were sustainable, potentially deliverable or developable sites, and that their allocation would be consistent with the spatial strategy.

Evaluation of the spatial strategy

70. The Plan designates eight strategic allocations, seven of which are on land to be released from the Green Belt.

71. Strategic allocations STRAT11: Land south of Grenoble Road; STRAT12: Land at Northfield; and STRAT13: Land north of Bayswater Brook are adjacent to Oxford's built up area, and are intended to meet Oxford's unmet housing need close to where it arises. 50% affordable housing will be sought to support Oxford's need for such housing. The strategy will allow for short journey distances by means of sustainable transport to Oxford's wide range of shopping, educational, social, medical and employment facilities, as well as having the potential to strengthen and regenerate retail, social and transport facilities within adjacent parts of Oxford, notably Blackbird Leys.

72. The characteristics of these sites are discussed in more detail in Issue 3, but in summary they consist largely of open land currently in the Green Belt, However, they are close to development on at least one side and are seen in the context of development. Whilst they contain public footpaths that facilitate access to open countryside, the sites themselves are not notably significant in landscape terms; and enough land is included in the allocations to enable good quality landscaping, greenspace and strong green boundaries to be provided.

Development of these sites would appear as natural extensions to the Oxford built-up area.

73. Science Vale covers an area across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and includes the world leading science and research centres at Harwell and Culham and the business and technology park at Milton Park (see Issue 3). Three strategic allocations are located in this area, all currently in the Green Belt: STRAT8: Culham Science Centre; STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre; and STRAT10: Land at Berinsfield. These are aimed at providing homes close to, and supporting the growth of, the employment opportunities in Science Vale. They are also intended to benefit from, and support, the range of Housing Infrastructure Fund improvements (described below) and, in the case of Berinsfield, support important regeneration initiatives. As with the three sites adjacent to Oxford, homes need to be located close to the employment centres to limit journey length in the interests of sustainable development and this entails the release of land from the Green Belt. Both of the housing-led allocations represent planned extensions to existing developed areas, not unrestricted sprawl: STRAT9 will provide a substantial number of homes adjacent to the important employment and research centre at STRAT8: Culham Science Centre, whilst STRAT10 is nearby and will assist in facilitating the regeneration of Berinsfield.

74. The successful Housing Infrastructure Fund bid by Oxfordshire County Council enables early delivery of a new crossing of the River Thames between Culham and Didcot, a bypass of Clifton Hampden, capacity enhancements to the A4130, and a new 'Science Bridge' improving access to growing areas of Didcot. These investments will enable STRAT8, STRAT9 and STRAT10 to proceed.

75. Sites which can be regarded as partly previously developed include STRAT7: Land at Chalgrove Airfield, which is outside the Green Belt, and STRAT14: Wheatley Campus, which is currently in the Green Belt. It should be noted that STRAT8: Culham Science Centre, referred to above, also in the Green Belt, can be regarded as a mainly previously developed site. The NPPF states that strategic policies should make as much use as possible of previously developed land. Planning permission has now been granted for development at Wheatley Campus.

76. The allocation at Chalgrove Airfield is discussed in more detail under Issue 3. At the strategic level, its choice is logical; it would deliver a large number of homes in a substantial settlement on partially brownfield land outside the Green Belt and adjacent to a larger village. Its size, together with the existing village of Chalgrove, would enable it to sustain a good range of facilities which would reduce the need for external trips and enable public transport to be supported, and its associated highway measures would be beneficial to conditions in other villages.

77. The Plan takes a logical and proportionate approach towards development in the market towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford having regard to their size and range of facilities. It takes into account the fact that that they have accepted considerable housing growth recently and have remaining housing commitments. Greater flexibility is required towards meeting housing needs in the market towns until the end of the plan period, as discussed under

Issue 3, but not to the extent that they should accept a notably greater proportion of the overall housing requirement.

78. The Plan justifiably classifies the villages into larger, smaller and other villages and takes a proportionate approach towards growth in them. More detailed issues regarding the villages are discussed under Issue 3.

79. The spatial strategy seeks to address the District's housing and employment needs in an integrated and sustainable manner. From the evidence it is clear that a strategy which does not meet Oxford's needs next to the city would not provide homes in locations where the need arises, exacerbating current supply and affordability problems in and around Oxford. Oxford is indisputably the main centre for a range of facilities, so such a strategy would result in longer journey times and would be more likely to encourage the use of the private car. Opportunities to help regenerate the Blackbird Leys area would be lost.

80. Similar problems would arise if the development needs of the Science Vale area were not adequately addressed; a substantial increase in the amount of development proposed for Didcot, which is also in Science Vale, is impractical (see below and Issue 3) so the effect would be to push development to more distant locations. Opportunities to regenerate Berinsfield, to provide homes next to a very important employment centre, and to support beneficial infrastructure improvements elsewhere, would then be lost.

81. Didcot was designated as a Garden Town in 2015 with the aim of delivering 15,050 homes and 20,000 high-tech jobs within the Greater Didcot area. The Plan makes modest additional allocations at Didcot because the town already has a very large amount of committed development, under construction and in the pipeline, as discussed in more detail under Issue 3. It is unrealistic to expect Didcot to accommodate, in addition to existing planned growth, all or some of the 3,800 homes that would be delivered in the plan period by sites STRAT9 and STRAT10 in Science Vale, and/or all or some of the 5,380 homes that would be delivered in the plan period on sites STRAT11, STRAT12 and STRAT13 adjacent to Oxford. Such an approach would not be a reasonable alternative. It would raise the Garden Town's housing allocations well above the planned delivery figure and would lead to delivery issues with too many outlets in one market, not enough choice of location for either builders or prospective buyers, and potential market saturation.

82. The market towns and the villages do not represent a reasonable alternative to the scale of growth proposed for the strategic allocations, because of their heritage, range of facilities, the quality of their surroundings, their location in respect of major employment opportunities and the implications for the infrastructure serving them.

83. Reading, bordering the District to the south, is too distant from Oxford or Science Vale to meet the housing needs of those areas and its Council has not asked South Oxfordshire to take any of its housing need, which is catered for elsewhere, or to make provision for housing in the vicinity of the town. Its emerging transport strategy, which includes park and ride and possible future highway provision, will entail discussion with South Oxfordshire in due course, but there is no justification in this Plan for seeking to allocate land adjacent to or near Reading.

84. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc is in the developmental phase. The National Infrastructure Commission produced recommendations for growth in 2017 and the Government responded to these in 2018. Policy TRANS1a expresses a commitment to plan for infrastructure and mitigation measures in connection with the Arc, but currently there is considerable uncertainty over detail and no overall spatial strategy for the Arc, and in the circumstances the Plan cannot reasonably make strategic allocations in anticipation of the project.

Green Belt considerations

85. Paragraph 137 of the NPPF says that, before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options; paragraph 138 points out that it is necessary to consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.

86. The Council has considered these matters fully. Individually, or in combination, the various non-Green Belt alternatives involving, for example, more growth at the market towns, the villages, Didcot and/or Reading, or indeed a freestanding new settlement beyond the Green Belt, would have significant practical disadvantages over the chosen spatial strategy. They would not address needs where they arise, would be less able to address housing affordability issues, and would result in longer journey patterns, imposing additional journey to work costs on people who may already find housing costs challenging. The opportunities for regeneration that would arise from the Plan's spatial strategy would be lost. A spatial strategy driven principally by the need to avoid Green Belt release would not promote sustainable development and would not meet the Plan's objectives.

87. The strategic allocations and their Green Belt impacts are discussed in more detail in Issue 3. In respect of the five purposes of the Green Belt, the allocations would, by their nature, conflict with the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. However, as planned urban extensions, the allocations would not amount to unrestricted sprawl; they would not cause neighbouring towns to merge; they would not cause any harm to the setting and special character of Oxford; and they would not impede urban regeneration and would potentially help to regenerate nearby areas. The allocations are of such a size that long term defensible boundaries and structural landscaping and good quality open space can be designed into the schemes' masterplans, such that the impact on the Green Belt can to a degree be mitigated.

88. Having regard to the significant level of housing need discussed in Issue 1, the need to maintain a delivery buffer ("headroom") to ensure the Plan is resilient, discussed in Issues 1 and 4, the range of factors discussed in this Issue, and the more detailed site analysis contained in Issue 3, exceptional circumstances exist for the release from the Green Belt of all the relevant site allocations. These exceptional circumstances extend to meeting employment and social needs as well as housing needs on the strategic allocations in order to achieve balanced, sustainable and well-integrated development.

89. Restricting the size of the Green Belt releases solely to the anticipated built areas would not be appropriate, partly because the boundaries of the built areas are not yet known and will be defined through future masterplans, and partly because such an approach would fail to take into account important related features of the allocation that must be implemented along with the development, including necessary infrastructure, landscaping, buffer zones and mitigation measures.

90. The overall integrity and purpose of the Oxford Green Belt would remain and would be protected by Policy STRAT6. To bring the policy into line with the NPPF, **MM9** indicates that the strategic allocations should deliver compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land, with measures supported by evidence of landscape, biodiversity or recreational needs and opportunities.

Conclusions on Issue 2

91. The plan seeks to meet overall development needs in the right places through a logical and evidence based spatial strategy. The spatial strategy meets Oxford's unmet housing need close to where it arises in well-chosen sites which encourage sustainable movement. It allocates appropriate housing and employment sites within the Science Vale area to support the economic growth of that area, it provides housing where it is needed, and it takes advantage of and supports the infrastructure improvements unlocked by the Housing Investment Fund. It makes the best use of previously developed land. A proportionate approach is taken towards growth at the market towns and the villages. The spatial strategy has innate logic and integrity and is supported by an extensive evidence base. Alternatives have been fully evaluated over a period of several years.

92. The spatial strategy requires land to be removed from the Green Belt to allow for all but one of the strategic allocations. The evidence demonstrates that the appropriate exercise under NPPF paragraph 137 has been carried out and all reasonable non-Green Belt options for meeting the identified need for development have been examined. The alternatives would locate development in the wrong places, resulting in longer journeys, higher costs, additional pollution, and additional pressure on existing settlements and their facilities; they would promote much less sustainable development patterns and would not address the area's pressing housing needs and housing affordability issues.

93. The allocations are of a size that can support employment, a range of facilities, public transport, cycling and walking connections and the necessary highway infrastructure to mitigate the impact of development. The spatial strategy both supports and responds to planned and funded infrastructure improvements and supports the potential for other improvements.

94. Subject to the main modification described above, the spatial strategy is appropriate having regard to the alternatives, logical, justified on the evidence, integrated and sound.

Issue 3 – Whether the Plan's strategic site allocations and its approach towards development in the towns, villages and countryside, is sound

Introduction

95. Issue 2 dealt with the spatial strategy and overarching Green Belt considerations. This issue addresses more detailed matters arising from the individual strategic site allocations and the policies for the towns, the villages and the countryside.

96. Comprehensive requirements for proposals on the strategic allocations are set out in STRAT4: Strategic Development. Proposals must be of an appropriate mix and scale, must be accompanied by a comprehensive masterplan and must ensure that the necessary supporting infrastructure is provided. The policy lists the evidence that needs to be submitted, with regard to landscape impact, health, transport, air quality, trees, equality ecology, flood risk, heritage and archaeology, and it includes a range of requirements in terms of design, transport and other factors. To ensure consistency with the plan's modified objectives and policies in respect of climate change issues, **MM7** adds a requirement that proposals should include a statement of how it is intended to achieve low carbon emissions and facilitate renewable energy generation.

STRAT7: Land at Chalgrove Airfield

97. This is an allocation on a 255 hectare site for about 3,000 new homes with at least 2,025 to be delivered within the plan period, together with 5 hectares of employment land, 3 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, and supporting services and facilities. For effectiveness, **MM10** updates this to 2,105 homes within the revised plan period, with at least 5 hectares of employment land, and adds education facilities, public open space and both convenience and comparison retail to the list of uses on the site.

98. The site is not in the Green Belt, and the Landscape Assessment Update (October 2018) (NAT04) considered that it has moderate landscape sensitivity. It is flat and relatively featureless and is not prominent in the landscape. In addition, the site can be regarded partly as previously developed land as it contains runways and other hard surfaced areas. "Chalgrove Field 1643", a registered historic battlefield, is located within the allocation boundary, but the overall allocation is large enough to ensure that the site can be developed without harming it. Detailed heritage and archaeological surveys need to be undertaken in line with Policy STRAT4 to demonstrate how adverse impacts will be avoided. In the interests of clarity, MM10 requires development to address heritage assets and their settings in accordance with Policies ENV6 to ENV10 of the Plan and the NPPF. In addition, MM10 introduces a new criterion setting out general principles for the location of different development densities in the site, with higher densities near the local centre and lower densities near the edges of the site to minimise the landscape and heritage aspects of the development. This modification is necessary to respond to the changes to Policy STRAT5: Residential Density, to ensure consistency with

similar modifications to other site allocations and to make the approach to density more locally-relevant.

99. It has been argued that Chalgrove is not a sustainable location, being several miles from Oxford, Reading and the market towns. However, in combination with the existing village of Chalgrove and the nearby Monument Business Park, it would create a significant settlement the size of a small town, capable of sustaining its own range of retail, social and employment opportunities, with growth potential beyond the end of the plan period. This would mean a higher percentage of internal trips; it would be capable of providing services for nearby villages; and it would be large enough to support bus links. In addition, the allocation would create an opportunity for sustainable design and construction, low carbon forms of development, combined energy networks and the generation of renewable energy. The allocation therefore provides an important opportunity to deliver a substantial part of the District's housing needs in a sustainable manner on a largely previously developed site without landscape significance outside the Green Belt and adjacent to a larger village.

100. Transport infrastructure delivered directly by the developers at Chalgrove (see Issue 5) would include walking and cycling routes, the Stadhampton & Chiselhampton Bypass, a bypass for Cuxham, improvements in Little Milton and Shirburn and road improvements to Hollandtide Lane and the B4015 between A4074 and the B480. The development would also contribute towards the Watlington Edge Road, an upgrade of the A4074 Golden Balls junction, the Benson relief road, and walking, cycling and public transport improvements on the B480 corridor. MM10 references the need to have regard to the heritage and landscape settings of the existing settlements.

101. The policy requires new or improved bus services including, but not limited to, increased frequency on the Chalgrove to Oxford bus route and an east west bus service linking Chalgrove to Didcot and potentially other employment and growth areas. For clarity and effectiveness, MM10 indicates that the Chalgrove to Oxford service should have a frequency of 4 buses an hour and it also clarifies the wording in respect of the east west service.

102. STRAT7 requires sufficient education capacity, likely to be two primary schools together with a secondary school which incorporates a relocation for Icknield School, Watlington, enabling the expansion and upgrading of secondary education in new premises. It would also include health care facilities, and retail provision in the form of convenience floorspace that would meet the day-to-day needs of the community without having an impact on other centres. However, this conflicts with the idea that Chalgrove would be a sustainable settlement providing facilities for the surrounding area. MM10 therefore includes comparison as well as convenience floorspace so that the allocation, together with the existing village, can fulfil the role of a service centre for surrounding villages.

103. An important objective is to integrate the allocation with the existing village. In common with the other strategic site policies, STRAT7 requires a masterplan to be produced which would ensure that any development is well integrated with the existing village. On this point it should be observed that many of the above social and transport infrastructure projects, as well as mitigating the effect of the allocation, would be of direct benefit to the existing

village and to other communities too. The re-routing of the road (B480) to run through the allocation, indicated on the concept plan, is intended to help integration but ultimately its route would be a matter for the masterplan.

104. In the interests of creating a sustainable settlement, and to ensure consistency with other Plan policies and the modifications to other strategic site allocations, MM10 requires high quality walking and cycling routes and infrastructure to support public transport within the site, low carbon development and renewable energy, and a net gain in biodiversity.

105. A leading global technological aviation-related business has a long lease on the site, and in order to facilitate the allocation it will be necessary to relocate the runway used by the company together with some of its operations. This is a requirement of Policy STRAT7 and a substantial part of the allocation is reserved for that purpose. However, the required runway length is not resolved between the business occupiers and Homes England, the site promoter, and various consents will be required from the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive with regard to any relocation of the runway and the company's bespoke testing operations.

106. Ultimately it will require formal technical work to establish the design and location of any replacement runway and to gain the necessary consents. However, the technical evidence presented to the examination by all relevant parties does not demonstrate conclusively that the issues are incapable of being resolved or that those consents cannot be gained. In addition, Homes England have acquired 189 hectares of additional land to the north of the site. This is not part of the allocation, but being in the control of the delivery body it has the potential, subject to necessary permissions, of providing more flexibility to enable the operational needs of the existing occupier to be met if this proved necessary.

107. From the evidence and a consideration of the relevant documents, there appears no reason at this time why the allocation should conflict with the Government's 2015 General Aviation Strategy or any emerging strategy arising from Aviation 2050.

108. The likely proximity of the allocation's new homes to the operation is noted, but in terms of separation this is little different from the current relationship between the existing runway and homes in Chalgrove. There is scope to vary the number of homes and the layout of development within the allocation to allow for any adjustments that may be necessary to protect living conditions and to enable the full range of operations to remain at Chalgrove.

109. Homes England have the power of compulsory purchase if that proves necessary. Whilst fully acknowledging the importance of the aviation operation, there is a very strong public interest in bringing forward the allocation site because it would ultimately deliver 3,000 much needed new homes, including affordable housing, together with new schools, social and retail facilities and transport improvements that would benefit both Chalgrove and other communities.

110. Taking all the above factors into account, and in the light of all the submitted evidence, it can be concluded that there is a reasonable prospect of the

allocation being implemented. Given that the site is owned by Homes England, who have the power if needed to compulsorily purchase land to facilitate the development and related infrastructure, the phasing (set out in document IC04A) and the housing delivery trajectory (set out in the Council's Matter 11 hearing statement) appear realistic. The housing trajectory indicates a relatively long lead-in time for the site, considerably longer than that envisaged by the site promoter, and the Plan is robust enough to deal with any delay in implementation (see Issue 4). Were the site to prove difficult to develop, the situation would be monitored, and the issue could be reconsidered in a subsequent plan.

STRAT8: Culham Science Centre

111. In the submitted plan this is a 73 hectare developed site which the Plan proposes to inset from the Green Belt. It contains internationally important research and related activities including the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy and, on this and the Culham No 1 site, mixed business activities. The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority intends to redevelop the buildings which are now outdated, and the Government has announced substantial funding to create new Centres of Excellence. This is an exceptional centre of knowledge, employment and research which presents a rare opportunity for growth in an area restricted by the Green Belt. STRAT8 states that the site will deliver at least a net increase in employment land, in conjunction with adjoining site STRAT9, of 7.3 hectares. Infrastructure, including the Didcot to Culham River Crossing, is required to support the expansion of the site and STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre is intended to part fund the River Crossing and the Clifton Hampden bypass.

112. The site is internationally important for research and it is essential that change and growth can be accommodated in the future. The purpose of the allocation is to enable the site in its entirety to realise its full potential as a science campus where publicly funded science research and commercial technology growth can flourish. The site contributes little to the openness of the Green Belt because of the scale of its buildings, and it is already clearly separate from the surrounding open countryside. For these reasons there are exceptional circumstances to allow the site to be inset from the Green Belt.

113. However, the Submission Policies Map retains the land at the entrance of the site in the Green Belt. As this land relates functionally to the site and contains the main entrance, its retention in the Green Belt could have a negative effect on the growth objectives for this site and it is not logical to apply a different policy to it. It is also the case that the Clifton Hampden bypass is likely to change the character of this location and create a new defensible boundary with the Green Belt. Consequently, the boundary of the inset area at STRAT8 should largely be contiguous with the safeguarding line of the Clifton Hampden bypass, to make the best use of this land, follow a defensible boundary, and ensure that the functioning of the site is not impaired. **MM11** amends the Concept Plan to take this into account and similar changes are required for the Policies Map. MM11 also amends the site to 77 hectares. This would not mean that the setting of Fullamoor Farmhouse, which is Grade II listed, would be affected; Policy ENV6 provides protection to heritage assets and their settings, and any development in this part of the site would need to take into account the setting of the building.

114. STRAT8 also requires development not to affect the openness of the Green Belt, but that is illogical because the Plan removes the site from the Green Belt. For greater clarity, MM11 replaces this with a requirement for development not to have an unacceptable visual effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.

115. MM11 also adds a requirement for the masterplan and any subsequent planning applications to take into account heritage assets and their settings; to achieve a net gain in biodiversity to ensure consistency with other strategic allocations, and to deliver low carbon development and renewable energy in accordance with Policy STRAT4. These are all required in the interests of consistency with the NPPF, internal consistency within the Plan, and soundness.

STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre

116. This 220 hectare site would be removed from the Green Belt and it is allocated for approximately 3,500 homes, 1,850 of which would be delivered within the plan period, together with supporting services and facilities. **MM12** updates the figure to reflect the site's ability to deliver 2,100 homes within the plan period. In combination with the adjacent Science Centre, it is expected to deliver 7.3 hectares of employment land, which MM12 makes a minimum figure to be consistent with EMP1 and MM38.

117. In conjunction with STRAT8, the development would be of sufficient size to create a new, fully sustainable settlement with substantial employment provision together with education, health care and convenience floorspace. The allocation would provide homes adjacent to STRAT8, with its significant potential for growth.

118. The allocation also requires 3 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers. These are fully justified in the light of the Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment which is discussed under Issue 6.

119. The Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (document NAT09) indicated that the site would not contribute to the unrestricted sprawl of any large town and would not cause coalescence, but was concerned about the urbanising influence on the countryside and in consequence came to the conclusion that the release of the whole parcel from the Green Belt would cause a high level of harm to the Green Belt. However, it concluded that releasing the southern part of the parcel would reduce the degree of encroachment on the countryside. The allocation in fact includes almost the whole parcel, but the indicative concept plan as modified by MM12 indicates that much of the northern part of the site would be devoted to green infrastructure and that the higher densities would be concentrated elsewhere. The allocation area is large enough to accommodate significant amounts of green infrastructure to create defensible boundaries to the developed area and this is a requirement of STRAT9 as modified by MM12. As a result, the effect on the Green Belt would be less than suggested by the Green Belt Assessment.

120. As regards the landscape and AONB, the updated Landscape Assessment Update (October 2018) (document NAT04) considered cumulative effects and

concluded that the sites to the east and west of the railway could be developed in combination, providing that the large site to the west of the railway is subject to sensitive masterplanning. This Study added that development of both the Culham and Berinsfield sites in their entirety would have cumulative adverse effects on views from Wittenham Clumps, a popular destination and viewpoint location within the North Wessex Downs AONB. However, as discussed above, Policy STRAT9 requires a layout that remains undeveloped to the northern border of the site and this will mitigate the effect of the allocation and the impact, in combination with Berinsfield, on views from the AONB.

121. Policy STRAT9 requires contributions towards a new crossing of the River Thames between Culham and Didcot and a bypass of Clifton Hampden (as clarified by MM12) and they must be delivered prior to any significant development at Culham. The intention is that the transport schemes will be delivered by 2024. The site is particularly well located in respect of the planned Didcot to Culham River Crossing and the Clifton Hampden Bypass, which are not only road links but also include pedestrian and cycle links and will help to facilitate new bus services, and there are also other opportunities for sustainable transport modes; in the interests of creating a sustainable development, MM12 requires high quality walking and cycling facilities and infrastructure to support public transport within the site.

122. STRAT9 includes requirements for contributions towards a cycle route towards Didcot and a scheduled bus service between Berinsfield, Culham and Abingdon with the potential for extending the service to other locations. It also requires the preservation and enhancement of the Green Belt Way and River Thames long distance footpaths. However, the consultation version of MM12 included a requirement to consider the setting of Oxford, but as the historic centre of the city is over 6 miles away with a substantial amount of intervening development, this requirement is not relevant and is not recommended as a main modification.

123. The site includes Culham railway station; the allocation would be well placed to take advantage of, and support an improvement in, rail services. STRAT9 requires contributions towards improvements to the station. The allocation would strengthen the business case for significant service enhancements and for investment in new infrastructure to increase rail capacity generally between Didcot and Oxford.

124. Turning to heritage assets, there are three listed buildings within the site: the station ticket office, the station overbridge and Thame Lane bridge. These are retained and there is no reason why development should harm their setting. The Grade II listed Schola Europaea is located just beyond the western end of the site but there is sufficient green infrastructure to create a green buffer and a strong Green Belt edge to protect its setting. The Grade I registered Nuneham Park and Garden lies east of the site, but again there is sufficient space within the site allocation to provide greenspace and a strong planted boundary to avoid any significant effect on the setting of the garden or the designated views from the garden over the River Thames. STRAT9 requires the masterplan to ensure that the settings of these heritage assets are respected.

125. The villages of Culham, Sutton Courtenay and Appleford-on-Thames are separate from the site allocation and their character and separate identity would not be affected.

126. Culham Brake Site of Special Scientific Interest is within 250m of the STRAT9 area. The SSSI is watered directly from the Swift Ditch and the allocation is unlikely to have any negative hydrological effect. There is also a heronry at Furze Brake Local Wildlife Site. Policy STRAT9 requires a masterplan that demonstrates a layout and appropriate mitigation measures that would protect Culham Brake SSSI and other habitats, and this approach is reinforced by MM12 which requires a net gain in biodiversity through the creation of new woodland habitats along the river escarpment and ecological enhancements of the floodplain habitats.

127. MM12 adds a new criterion to the policy to encourage developers to extract minerals prior to development where practical and environmentally feasible, to ensure consistency with Policy EP5: Minerals Safeguarding Areas.

128. In the interests of sustainable development, MM12 inserts a new requirement into Policy STRAT9 seeking low carbon development and renewable energy to ensure consistency with other strategic allocations and with Policies DES9, DES10 and new Policy DES11 introduced by MM71.

129. Taking all the above factors into account, the benefits of the allocation in terms of providing a large number of new homes to address overall housing need and affordable housing need in Science Vale, in a sustainable location adjacent to a major employment location, outweigh the degree of harm arising from the removal of this land from the Green Belt. There are exceptional circumstances to release the site from the Green Belt.

STRAT10: Land at Berinsfield

130. This is an allocation to extend the village of Berinsfield to provide 1,700 new homes, with 1,600 to be provided within the plan period, together with 5 hectares of employment land and supporting facilities and services. **MM14** updates the number of new homes the site is expected to provide within the plan period to 1,700 based on the latest information from the site promoter. The village is currently in the Green Belt and the Plan proposes to inset the village and the site allocation from the Green Belt.

131. Berinsfield village scores adversely on the indices of deprivation, in the areas of income, education, skills and training, employment and other factors, whilst its housing tenure mix is more unbalanced than in other parts of the District, with higher levels of social rent. The regeneration of Berinsfield is a Council priority, with a funded Community Investment Scheme and an identified regeneration package. Policy STRAT10 states that the number of new homes should demonstrably support the regeneration of Berinsfield and the delivery of necessary social infrastructure.

132. The Government awarded Berinsfield Garden Village status in June 2019, after the submission of the Plan for examination, but Policy STRAT10 does not reflect this. **MM13** therefore creates a new Policy STRAT10: Berinsfield Garden Village which sets out the Berinsfield Garden Village Principles, which all

development is expected to meet, and the former STRAT10 becomes STRAT10i by virtue of MM14.

133. The originally submitted Policy STRAT10, now STRAT10i, requires development to deliver "the entire cost of the necessary regeneration package" but this is not precise or accurate enough and there may be other sources of funding. MM14 therefore modifies the policy by deleting references to costs and the regeneration package, and by being more specific about the regeneration measures. These are likely to include the refurbishment and expansion of the Abbey Sports Centre and library to create a new community hub, which may also include an expanded or new health centre. MM14 is also more specific about the nature of the additional education provision. References in the explanatory text to the regeneration package requiring new premises are deleted by MM13 in order to provide flexibility as to how the facilities are delivered. These modifications are all required to ensure the policy is effective.

134. The Council's concerns about the unbalanced tenure mix have raised questions about whether the plan should make an exception to the requirement in Policy H9: Affordable Housing to seek 40% affordable housing (see Issue 6). However, there is a large need for affordable housing in the District which Policy H9 seeks to address, and it is appropriate for all the strategic site allocations including STRAT10 to contribute towards meeting this need. MM14 instead allows for evidence-based variations in the tenure mix within the definition of affordable housing. This would allow for lower levels of social rented housing than sought on all other sites by Policy H9, and is consistent with MM27 which exempts Berinsfield from the tenure mix requirements of Policy H9. This is a sound approach.

135. The Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (document NAT09) concluded that the proposed allocation did not raise any concern about adding to the unrestricted sprawl of a large urban area, causing neighbouring towns to merge or harming the setting of Oxford, but it considered that developing the whole site would represent significant encroachment on the countryside. Development away from the village on the eastern side of the allocation was considered to have a greater impact on the Green Belt than development on the western side of the site. The Landscape Assessment Update (document NAT04) considered the site to have only moderate landscape value but substantial landscape sensitivity, with the site visible in the expansive view from Wittenham Clumps in the AONB, and, as with the Green Belt Assessment, the higher sensitivity areas were considered to be located towards the east of the site. MM14 adds a new criterion to the policy which aims to concentrate the highest densities at the western end of the site close to a new local centre and locate lower densities and green infrastructure towards the northern and eastern countryside edges. This is also illustrated on the accompanying concept plan as modified by MM14, which shows most of the eastern side of the site remaining open with a large area of green infrastructure and Green Belt reinforcement. Subject to MM14, the approach will assist in limiting the impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the visual impact on the countryside, including the combined effect of this site and STRAT9 on the view from Wittenham Clumps.

136. As with STRAT8 and STRAT9, the Didcot to Culham River Crossing, the Clifton Hampden bypass (HIF Infrastructure); and improvements to the Golden Balls

roundabout are required to mitigate the transport effects of development at Berinsfield. The HIF infrastructure needs to be in place prior to the commencement of development at Berinsfield; the funding must be committed by 2024 and the infrastructure is expected to be in place shortly afterwards. The Plan seeks contributions towards these infrastructure works.

137. MM14 introduces new criteria to Policy STRAT10 (now STRAT10i) seeking, within the site, high quality walking and cycling routes and the provision of infrastructure to support public transport; a net gain in biodiversity with extensive new woodland planting in the north and east of the site and green linkages within the site; and low carbon development and renewable energy. These are all required in the interests of achieving sustainable development, and to ensure consistency with the Plan's other site allocations and policies.

138. In addition, to protect potential heritage assets, MM14 seeks an archaeological evaluation and where appropriate a scheme of mitigation, in accordance with chapter 16 of the NPPF.

139. The allocation, together with the existing village, would constitute a substantial settlement capable of sustaining a reasonable range of facilities. There is no convincing evidence to suggest that the allocation ought to be enlarged to provide greater support for regeneration or infrastructure provision; and enlargement, for example towards Queenford Lakes, would extend the allocation closer to other settlements.

140. The allocation would be highly beneficial in that it would make a significant contribution towards meeting South Oxfordshire's housing needs, including affordable housing needs, in a location close to the important research, business and employment establishments in Science Vale and it would assist in regenerating Berinsfield. Set against this, there would be harm from the removal of this land from the Green Belt, but the impact could be moderated as described above. Taking all factors into account, there are exceptional circumstances for releasing the land from the Green Belt.

STRAT11: Land south of Grenoble Road

141. This is a 153 hectare allocation adjacent to Oxford's built up area, on land to be removed from the Green Belt, which the Plan states will deliver approximately 3,000 new homes, 1,700 within the plan period. Since the Plan was published, the potential for delivery within the revised Plan period has been re-appraised in consultation with the site promoters and **MM15** indicates that 2,480 new homes will be delivered within the plan period.

142. The allocation seeks to create a substantial community with a range of uses including the provision of education capacity in primary and secondary schools (with secondary school capacity quantified by MM15), convenience floorspace and open space, as well as contributions to primary healthcare facilities. The policy also requires integration with the nearby community of Blackbird Leys. The allocation provides the opportunity to help regenerate Blackbird Leys by providing new services and facilities on site and by sustaining and improving services and facilities within Blackbird Leys. MM15 makes it clear in the interests of effectiveness and to ensure compliance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations that these improvements will be those

necessary to address impacts from the increased usage by the residents of STRAT11.

143. The allocation includes 9.7 hectares of land extending the Oxford Science Park. MM15 modifies this to at least 10 hectares to be consistent with the more flexible approach towards employment development discussed in Issue 7. The Science Park is of national importance because of its knowledge industries and research and there are no other deliverable options that the Plan can identify, or that are available within Oxford's boundaries, that would allow for its growth. The allocation would therefore support the economic growth of the knowledge industry to the south of the City along the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine. The Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy - Technical Negotiating Draft (document ECO07) establishes that access to readily available laboratory space is a key factor that has constrained economic growth in Oxfordshire. It also states that options to expand on existing Science Parks are limited and that laboratory space might not meet demand in Oxfordshire over the next five years, as more companies are spun out of the universities.

144. Land is made available for a Park and Ride site adjacent to the A4074 and other services and facilities. At the moment a final decision about a Park and Ride site has not been made and such a facility is currently not funded, but the development would provide land for the facility, and if it were implemented, buses would be able to serve both the residential development and the Park and Ride site. It is therefore reasonable to safeguard the site within the allocation.

145. The proximity to Oxford means that good walking and cycling connections can be established into the City, and this is a requirement of Policy STRAT11. There is potential to reopen the Cowley Branch Line for passenger traffic and the allocation would both support the aim of opening the line and would benefit from its proximity. MM15 adds a requirement for improvements to highway infrastructure in the vicinity of the site, to reflect the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and ensure consistency with other strategic allocation policies.

146. The site is adjacent to a sewage works, and policy STRAT11 requires a comprehensive odour assessment to identify necessary mitigation measures which would need to be implemented before homes are occupied. This is likely to be unnecessary for some parts of the site, so to enable some development to be brought forward earlier, MM15 simply seeks mitigation measures in accordance with the assessment's recommendations.

147. Consistent with the main modifications for other strategic sites, MM15 contains a new criterion addressing the expected density of development in different parts of the site. This is to respond to particular local conditions, as part of a more effective approach towards development densities in conjunction with MM8 which removes the prescriptive densities in STRAT5 of the Plan (Issue 8).

148. MM15 adds requirements for low carbon development and renewable energy and requires high quality walking and cycling routes within the site to ensure consistency with the modifications to other strategic allocation policies and with the stronger theme of climate change mitigation and sustainable

development introduced throughout the Plan. MM15 also seeks a net gain in biodiversity which ties in with Policy ENV3 on biodiversity.

149. The Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (2018) (document NAT09) appraised the allocation as causing moderate harm to the Green Belt, with the existing sewage works, the electricity substation and the overhead power lines all having an impact on countryside character. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for potential strategic allocations (2018) (document NAT05) assessed landscape value as medium and recommended that the site should be considered further as a potential strategic allocation, subject to some observations about factors the allocation should take into account; the Landscape Assessment Update (2018) (document NAT04) considered the site to have moderate landscape value with medium development capacity. Whilst the allocation would occupy land currently designated as Green Belt, its impact on the overall purposes of the Green Belt would be modest. The site comprises relatively flat, unremarkable agricultural land closely related visually to the edge of Oxford. There would be a wide gap between any development and The Baldons to the south. The site allocation includes enough land to enable open space and planting to be included which will help to break up the built up appearance of the development and create a new landscaped southern edge to this part of Oxford which would act as a strong Green Belt boundary. This is a requirement of the policy, as demonstrated by the concept plan for the site, modified and updated by MM15.

150. STRAT11 requires a comprehensive masterplan for the site and a strategy for the regeneration of the nearby Oxford community of Greater Leys. In the interests of effective joint working, MM15 indicates that this will need to be prepared in collaboration with Oxford City Council in addition to South Oxfordshire District Council.

151. Overall there would be significant benefits from STRAT11, which include the provision of a significant number of homes to contribute towards Oxford's unmet housing needs, including affordable housing, and the extension of Oxford Science Park. The potential to provide improved facilities to assist towards the regeneration of Blackbird Leys, the potential to provide a Park and Ride site on the A4074 and the potential support for the future re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line are added advantages of the allocation. Set against this, there would be harm from the removal of this site from the Green Belt, but this could be moderated as described above. Taking all the factors into account, there are exceptional circumstances for the release of this site from the Green Belt.

STRAT12: Land at Northfield

152. This is a 68 hectare allocation close to the south-eastern side of Oxford which the Plan removes from the Green Belt to provide for about 1,800 homes, including a substantial proportion of affordable housing, all to be delivered within the plan period, together with supporting services. The site is very well located in relation to a number of employment opportunities on this side of Oxford, including Unipart, the Mini Plant, the Oxford Business Park and the Oxford Science Park, and it is well located in respect of the public transport corridor along the B480.

153. The allocation would reduce the distance between the edge of the Oxford built up area and Garsington. The Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (document NAT09) (2018) considered that there would be some scope to release land without having as strong an impact on Garsington by releasing land as far as Northfield Brook, and the strategic allocation takes this into account. The assessment observed that the Unipart buildings are a dominating feature, so the formation of a new urban edge to the east would not significantly alter the extent of urban influence in the Green Belt. The Strategic Allocation Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (document NAT05) considered the landscape to have low sensitivity.

154. Document NAT05 sets out several recommendations in respect of green infrastructure and new planting which can be accommodated by any development on the site. At the present time this part of the Oxford urban edge is abrupt and hard, with large scale buildings dominating the Green Belt. The allocation site would contain sufficient space to include boundary and structural planting which would soften the edge of the built-up area compared with the present view of Unipart and minimise the impact of the development on the Green Belt. This is a requirement of STRAT12. There would still be a substantial gap between the allocation and Garsington, and the allocation would not conflict with the Green Belt purpose of preventing neighbouring towns from merging. Moreover, as a planned urban extension subject to a masterplan, it would not constitute unrestricted sprawl.

155. This approach would require higher density development to be concentrated along key transport corridors, adjacent to the local centre, and towards the north west boundary of the site, with lower densities towards the countryside edge. To ensure the policy is effective, **MM16** includes this requirement in a new development criterion, and in changes to the concept plan. However, the north western part of the site is close to Unipart and other business operations that may generate noise, and it is important that the masterplan layout takes this into account to ensure satisfactory living conditions for future residents and to avoid any negative effects on the businesses themselves. MM16 reflects this, representing a change from the consultation version of the main modification.

156. STRAT12 seeks to mitigate the effects of congestion and improve the pedestrian and cycle routes on the B480 by seeking transport improvements either through direct mitigation or contributions; these include a scheme to improve the B480 towards Cowley for buses. In the interests of a sound plan, MM16 extends this to pedestrians and cyclists and seeks the provision of, and contributions towards, the public rights of way network. A study is being carried out by Oxfordshire County Council to consider appropriate walking, cycling and public transport improvements to the B480 corridor. The allocation would also benefit from the re-opening of the Cowley branch line and would add to the business case for opening the line.

157. MM16 also includes upgrades to the existing junctions on the Oxford Eastern Bypass (A4142), including the Cowley junction, to address the impacts of development. This extends the scope of the package of measures, compared with the submitted plan, which only mentions the Cowley junction. It is appropriate to refer to the potential for wider mitigation work but ultimately,

in accordance with Policy INF1, upgrades can only be required if they are made necessary as a consequence of development.

158. The transport measures as a whole will help to benefit existing journeys as well as mitigating the impact of the strategic allocation, and will help to integrate the site with the city. Given that most journeys are likely to be in the Oxford direction, and that the transport improvement measures would facilitate movement in that direction, it is unlikely that conditions in Garsington would be significantly affected by the allocation.

159. STRAT12 contains similar requirements to STRAT11 in respect of education capacity, primary healthcare and convenience retail floorspace, and a similar requirement for a comprehensive masterplan. As with MM15 and STRAT11, and for the same reasons, MM16 alters the policy in respect of development density to better reflect the local circumstances of the site; and seeks low carbon development and renewable energy. MM16 also clarifies that the secondary school provision and Special Education Needs for which contributions will be sought are off-site.

160. In the interests of soundness, MM16 seeks an archaeological evaluation and a scheme of mitigation where appropriate because the site lies within an area of archaeological potential as set out in the Heritage Impact Assessment (document BHE03.1).

161. The majority of the site is in Flood Zone 1, with a low probability of flooding, and STRAT12 requires specific flood mitigation and management within this zone. The areas in Flood Zones 2 and 3 near Hollow Brook and Northfield Brook are in the southern part of the site which the concept plan shows as green infrastructure. There are no statutory wildlife designations on the site and MM16 seeks a net gain in biodiversity to ensure consistency with other site allocations and Policy ENV3.

162. There are considerable advantages to STRAT12, including the ability of the site to help towards meeting Oxford's unmet housing needs close to where need arises, the provision of affordable housing, and the sustainable location of the site close to the employment opportunities and other facilities in Oxford, and to a public transport corridor. There would be harm arising from the removal of the site from the Green Belt, but taking MM16 into account, the impact on the Green Belt would be limited. Overall there are exceptional circumstances for the alteration of the Green Belt boundary to facilitate the allocation.

STRAT13: Land north of Bayswater Brook

163. This is a 112 hectare allocation on the eastern side of Oxford for about 1,100 homes, including affordable housing, and supporting services and facilities, all delivered within the plan period. As with STRAT11 and STRAT12, the policy includes requirements in respect of education provision, primary healthcare services, and convenience floorspace. The site is very well placed in relation to Oxford and its employment centres including the John Radcliffe Hospital.

164. The Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (2018) (document NAT09) evaluated the land north of Bayswater Brook in four parcels and came to the conclusion that the release of each of the parcels as a whole, except for one,

would result in a high level of harm to the Green Belt. The exception was the parcel just north of Sandhills, which was considered to have low/moderate impact. However, the allocation does not propose development over the whole of these land parcels.

165. The South Oxfordshire landscape capacity assessment update (document NAT04) considered the western part of the site to be highly sensitive in landscape terms due to the location of the Oxford view cone and the visibility of this part of the site from elevated footpaths. The high ground within the entire site was also regarded as sensitive. The lower ground to the south east of the site was identified as having a higher capacity to accept development in landscape terms as this land is less visible.

166. Having regard to these conclusions, STRAT13 contains requirements which would limit visual impact on the surrounding countryside and provide a defensible Green Belt boundary and a strong countryside edge. Development would be confined to a strip related to the existing built up area, away from the view cone, and softened by green infrastructure and with a strong defensible boundary. Being on a slope facing inwards towards Oxford, it would relate well both to existing development and to the new development at Barton Park and would not rise up the hill to the extent that it would affect the wider setting of Oxford or spill out on to and over the plateau to the south. The concept plan shows a series of separate development areas on the lower slopes, but away from the higher flood risk area along Bayswater Brook, occupying a much smaller developed area than overall allocation, and smaller than the extent of the land parcels evaluated in the Green Belt Assessment of Strategic Sites (document NAT09). Much of the allocation would be devoted to green infrastructure. With these requirements in place the impact on the Green Belt would be reduced.

167. The allocation boundary comes close to Sydlings Copse and College Pond Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Strategic Site Assessment Paper (document TOP06.1) and the Ecological Assessment of the SSSI (document NAT14) identified that the allocation could result in more recreational visitors to the SSSI, with potential effects on species and habitats. The Ecological Assessment observed that few people currently visit the SSSI, and that the public right of way that passes directly from the proposed development site through the SSSI offers little potential for off path access into the SSSI. However, it recommended measures including exploring the feasibility of enhancing and restoring the fencing along the northern boundary of the SSSI. It also recommended that green infrastructure (similar to SANG provision) should be provided between the SSSI and the residential development area, to reduce the effect of increased visitor pressure on the site's sensitive habitats. It also pointed to the need to collect hydrological data to inform subsequent ecological assessment work.

168. As the overall allocation area is substantially larger than the area for development, there is sufficient land to incorporate a buffer and alternative greenspace between development and the SSSI. In addition, STRAT13 requires development to protect and enhance existing habitats including the SSSI and to ensure that there is no demonstrable negative recreational, hydrological or air quality impacts on the SSSI. **MM17** adds requirements for a net gain in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of habitats

along Bayswater Brook and new habitats to the north buffering the SSSI, and a reduction of development density close to the SSSI. It also requires the masterplanning of the site to take into account the recommendations of the Ecological Assessment and a detailed hydrological assessment. Subject to these modifications the Plan's requirements will ensure that the SSSI and its hydrology are protected.

169. Discussions have been taking place between Oxfordshire County Council and the site promoters to establish the access arrangements to the site. Policy STRAT13 states that the road access is likely to include a road between the site and the A40/B4150/Marsh Lane junction (the Marston interchange). This would cross undeveloped land at the western end of the allocation but there is scope for planting and there is no reason why it should harm the landscape or the view cone. The smaller Sandhills part of the allocation is capable of being accessed through the existing road network. Careful design would be required to minimise the impact on highway or living conditions and the users of the rights of way which the access would cross.

170. STRAT13 also states that there would be either a new road link between the site and the A40 between Thornhill Park and Ride junction and the Church Hill junction, or significant upgrades to the existing A40 northern Oxford bypass including A40 /A4142 Headington roundabout. However, the actual requirements are not known and designs have not yet been produced. It is not appropriate for the policy itself to put forward road-based requirements without first considering measures to encourage sustainable transport and limit the propensity to use private motor vehicles through masterplanning and design, in the manner of the adjacent Oxford Local Plan. Moreover, the A40 is something of a barrier to walking into Oxford and the development needs to address it.

171. MM17 therefore indicates that, as a first priority, there should be high quality pedestrian, cycle and public transport connections into Oxford to maximise the number of trips made by non-car modes, together with measures to discourage car-based development. If, having evaluated the impact of these measures, significant residual traffic impacts are predicted, new highway measures would be required to mitigate them. MM17 shifts the policy references to possible road improvements into the supporting text. Following the main modifications consultation, some additional wording has been inserted into this supporting text to make it clearer.

172. It would not be appropriate to enlarge the site because this would require additional Green Belt land to be released when the Plan already makes sufficient provision for new homes.

173. MM17 requires air quality mitigation measures to minimise impacts on the Oxford Air Quality Management Area; low carbon development and renewable energy consistent with the modifications to other strategic allocations; and a landscape buffer between development and Wick Farm, to protect the setting of heritage assets.

174. Taking all the relevant factors into account, including the extent of Green Belt harm referred to above, the ability of this site to help in addressing Oxford's unmet housing needs, including affordable housing, as discussed in Issues 1

and 6, in a location close to Oxford and its employment opportunities and other facilities, amount to exceptional circumstances that justify the alteration of the Green Belt boundary.

STRAT14: Wheatley Campus

175. This is a 22 hectare site with an existing developed footprint of 12 hectares. The policy insets the site from the Green Belt (in other words it removes it from the Green Belt) and states that at least 300 new homes will be built there during the plan period.

176. The allocation makes good use of a previously developed site close to a main route into Oxford. The site now has outline planning permission so **MM18** modifies the policy to reflect the terms of the permission, including a requirement for approximately 500 new homes, and it establishes the pattern of development, including densities and transport improvements. The existence of the planning permission and commitment to development, and the fact that the site is already partly developed, amount to exceptional circumstances to remove the site from the Green Belt.

177. MM18 also seeks low carbon development and renewable energy in accordance with STRAT4. This is not a condition of the outline planning permission, so adherence to the detailed terms of STRAT4 may not be possible within the terms of that permission. However, there is no reason why the Council should not encourage detailed applications to contain low carbon development where this is compatible with the outline permission. The wording of MM18 has been changed following the main modifications consultation to reflect this point.

Didcot

178. Didcot was designated as a Garden Town in 2015 with the aim of delivering 15,050 homes and 20,000 high-tech jobs within the Greater Didcot area. In the Plan, Policy STRAT3: Didcot Garden Town simply expects development to demonstrate how it positively contributes to the achievement of the Didcot Garden Town principles, which are set out in Appendix 6. However, this means that STRAT3 itself contains no clear policy requirements. **MM6** expands the policy to set out the Plan's aims for Didcot Garden Town and expresses the overall development principles (in Figure 1), which are brought forward from Appendix 6.

179. Policy H2 states that provision will be made for around 6,500 homes at Didcot within the plan period. **MM24** updates this to 6,399 homes between 2011 and 2035. This is a very substantial number of homes, the majority of which arise from allocations in the Local Plan 2011 and the Core Strategy. Many are still to be delivered, at Didcot North East, Ladygrove East and Vauxhall Barracks, as well as the remaining complement at Great Western Park. To this must be added homes that are expected to be delivered in Vale of White Horse District, for example at Valley Park, North West Valley Park and Milton Heights. Including Land adjacent to Culham Science Centre, there are currently 16,445 homes allocated at and in the vicinity of Didcot, including some allocations that deliver beyond the plan period (without STRAT9: Land adjacent to

Culham Science Centre the figure is 12,945) (document PSD70). If all housing growth on unallocated sites was included the figure would be higher still.

180. Owing to the very significant volume of existing commitments, the Plan does not make provision for further large increases in housing at Didcot. New allocations include (as updated by MM24) Didcot Gateway (300 homes), Land South of A4130 (166 homes) and Hadden Hill (74 homes). For effectiveness, MM24 sets out development requirements for the Ladygrove East site because it does not yet have full planning permission. Both the table of allocations and the new paragraph dealing with Ladygrove East allow for flexibility in the overall numbers to be delivered on the site.

181. For the same reasons, it would not be appropriate for STRAT3 to indicate that housing will be permissible anywhere within the defined Garden Town area; it is necessary to maintain control over the spatial and phasing aspects of the Garden Town's growth.

182. The Housing Infrastructure Fund bid of £218m for transport infrastructure improvements has now been approved (MM6 updates STRAT3 accordingly), and this will enable infrastructure to support key development sites in and around Didcot, but some of this is intended to address existing constraints. Even if it were possible to deliver more housing at Didcot than is already committed and allocated, which is improbable given the issues discussed above and in Issue 2, it would be likely to result in physical and social infrastructure lagging behind growth.

183. The Plan takes a realistic and reasonable approach, which will still allow Didcot to grow substantially and play an important part in the spatial strategy whilst ensuring adequate control over growth, phasing and infrastructure provision. Didcot is not in the Green Belt, but allocating further development to the town would not, in this plan, be a reasonable alternative to the allocations on the edges of Oxford and those at Culham or Berinsfield, which fulfil important objectives and provide a choice of sites and locations to meet different needs.

The Market Towns

184. Policy H3 sets out the housing requirement in the market towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford. This is for a total of 3,873 homes, divided between the three towns, although a figure for Wallingford is omitted because the Plan considers there to be no residual requirement (see below). The figure is based on a starting point of 15% growth to the 2011 existing housing stock plus the requirements from the Core Strategy, to be delivered through the neighbourhood plans. The general approach (apart from the omission of Wallingford) is reasonable as it would result in proportionate growth depending on the existing size of the town. However, paragraph 5.16 of the Plan appears to allow neighbourhood plans to deliver below 15%, whereas there is no convincing evidence that this is necessary to avoid harm to any of the towns, the surrounding landscape, the AONB or other designations.

185. Moreover, housing delivered or committed since the start of the plan period means that at this stage, with almost 15 years still to go until the end of the plan period, most of the requirement for Thame and Henley, and all of the requirement for Wallingford, has been met. Policy H3 is written in such a way

that neighbourhood plans only need to cater for the relatively small residual amounts: 156 in Henley, 363 in Thame, and none in Wallingford. In practice this would be likely to prevent sustainable development from taking place over a considerable number of years which would impair the ability to meet demonstrable local housing needs that could arise during that period.

186. The market towns are sustainable towns with a reasonable range of facilities and should be expected to play a proportionate role in meeting the District's housing needs. **MM25** therefore expresses as minima the Policy H3 housing requirements for the market towns, including Wallingford, and deletes the references to residual requirements. It also indicates that neighbourhood development plans for the market towns should seek to meet demonstrable local needs, for example for specialist or affordable housing, even where this would result in provision above the outstanding requirement. This additional flexibility would not result in excessive unplanned development because Policy H1 exerts control over sites not allocated in the development plan; nor would it threaten either the character of the AONBs or the historic character of the market towns, because Policy ENV1 contains strong protection for the AONBs and Policies ENV6 to ENV9 equally protect heritage assets.[3]

187. MM25 also adds a new paragraph to Policy H3 in the interests of effectiveness, setting out access and landscaping criteria for the housing allocation on land West of Wallingford, because the site (carried over from a previous local plan) does not have full planning permission.

188. Policies HEN1: The Strategy for Henley-on-Thames and TH1: The Strategy for Thame, and Policy WAL1: The Strategy for Wallingford, state that the Council will support development proposals that are in accordance with the neighbourhood plan for the town (the emerging neighbourhood plan, in the case of Wallingford, commensurate with the plan making stage it has reached). These statements have no value, because a made neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan in any case, and an emerging plan may carry little weight in its early stages. The policies also state that development proposals will be supported which deliver certain specific aims for each town. Although these aims are appropriate as far as they go, they are not fully effective because they do not include housing delivery, nor does the policy link them to what is expected of the neighbourhood development plan.

189. **MM19**, **MM20** and **MM21** correct this for Policies HEN1, TH1 and WAL1 by including housing delivery as an aim in accordance with Policy H3, and by stating that neighbourhood plans are expected to meet these aims, and they (and MM25) include some additional explanatory text to guide developers and neighbourhood planning bodies. They add cycle parking in the town centres to the list of aims to help encourage sustainable travel. MM19 and MM21 also make Policies HEN1 and WAL1 consistent with Policy TH1 in expressing support for proposals that provide new or enhanced community facilities.

[3] In this respect, and throughout the examination, regard has been had to the duties contained in s85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

These modifications are required to make the policies sound, effective and consistent.

The villages and the countryside

190. For the larger villages, the Plan proposes 15% growth calculated in the same way as that for the market towns. This is a proportionate approach which takes into account the existing size of the villages. The overall requirement of 499 homes, and the residual requirements, are set out in Policy H4: Housing in the larger villages. **MM26** updates the figures in the policy and the accompanying table to take into account revised capacities and completions. The requirement is now 257 homes.

191. Owing to their size, location and limited range of facilities, it is not appropriate, with two exceptions, to rely on the larger villages to play more than a modest role in meeting the District's needs. The exceptions of course are Berinsfield and Chalgrove, for the special reasons discussed above. It is not therefore necessary to modify Policy H4 to provide greater flexibility to deliver homes in the same way that MM25 does for Policy H3.

192. The housing total includes three sites at Nettlebed, addressed by Policies H5, H6 and H7, which are allocated because the community has decided not to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The development proposed in each is appropriate for the village in both scale and location.

193. For the smaller villages, Policy H8 supports development which is in accordance with Policy H16, which is modified by **MM33** (Issue 8) to the effect that development should be limited to infill and the redevelopment of previously developed land or buildings. This is also consistent with Policy H1 as modified by MM23 (see Issue 4). It also allows neighbourhood development plans to allocate housing, with an expectation of 5% to 10% growth above the number of dwellings in 2011, minus any completions. This again is an appropriate and proportionate approach towards development in the smaller villages.

194. Other villages are, reasonably, not expected to constitute a significant source of housing supply although Policy H1 as modified by MM23 (see Issue 4) allows for infilling and development on brownfield sites.

195. The effect of Policy H1 is to restrict development in unclassified settlements and development in the countryside; this is an appropriate approach to avoid a proliferation of new buildings in the countryside and additional traffic on country lanes.

Conclusion on Issue 3

196. The requirements of STRAT4 together with the other plan policies provide strong control over, and guidance for, the development of the strategic allocations to ensure that development is of high quality, respects its surroundings and gives appropriate consideration to landscape, heritage, biodiversity and other important factors. The scale of the allocations provides the space and opportunity to help assimilate development into the landscape, including views from the AONBs, create strong Green Belt boundaries, provide

internal green infrastructure, allow for biodiversity gain, and provide adequate mitigation, for example to avoid additional pressure on nearby SSSIs and other sites of natural interest.

197. Subject to the main modifications described above, the Plan's strategic allocations, and its approach towards development in the towns, villages and the countryside, is sound.

Issue 4 – Whether the plan will provide adequately for the delivery of housing to meet the housing requirement, and whether 5 years' supply of homes can be maintained

198. For new components of housing supply, the Plan relies largely on the delivery of seven of the strategic sites, discussed above. There is usually a degree of risk associated with large sites, as highlighted by the Lichfields report "Start to Finish", because of their scale and their infrastructure requirements and partly because of their position in the market in relation to smaller, more easily developed sites. All the strategic sites in the Plan have infrastructure requirements which will affect lead-in times and STRAT7: Land at Chalgrove Airfield, also requires the relocation of some of the operations of an existing occupier. As regards both lead-in times and build-out rates, parallels have been drawn with those at Great Western Park, Didcot, which has taken several years to develop, and it has also been suggested that the amount of new housing proposed in the Didcot / Science Vale area, including that in Vale of White Horse District, will tend to saturate the market and slow delivery.

199. However, the Council has engaged with site owners, promoters and developers to establish realistic lead-in times for the main allocations and it has carried out an assessment of build-out rates for major sites with detailed permission, informed by information from developers and site promoters and moderated by officer knowledge and experience. It has also carried out an assessment of past completion rates to ensure site trajectories are realistic (see Document PSD44). The Council's analysis appears sound and well researched in this regard. In respect of the wider area there is no convincing evidence that, with the planned amount of growth, market saturation would occur which would slow down housing delivery. South Oxfordshire is generally an area of high housing need which can sustain higher delivery rates.

200. It is also clear from Issue 5 that the Plan's policy and infrastructure requirements can be viably delivered. Moreover, the Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid has been approved which includes Didcot Science Bridge, improvements to the A4130, a new river crossing from Culham to Didcot and a bypass at Clifton Hampden. This funding, which is recoverable from development through planning obligations and hence capable of being re-cycled (Policy INF1 as modified by MM49), will support the delivery of homes in Didcot Garden Town, Culham and Berinsfield. In the case of Chalgrove Airfield, the Council has taken a cautious approach and is indicating a longer lead-in time than that suggested by the site owner, Homes England.

201. It has been argued that the plan is too dependent on strategic housing allocations, and it is true that if one looks solely at the new components of

housing supply, the great majority are contributed by the new strategic allocations. However, when sources of housing supply are considered as a whole, a different picture emerges. The Council has undertaken an extensive analysis of housing supply, and this is summarised in document PSD44 and in the Housing Topic Paper, document TOP.01. It includes a site-by-site delivery assessment in respect of all sites with planning permission, a trajectory containing allocations, planning permissions and resolutions to grant, and a windfall allowance of 100 dpa has been included from the fourth year of the trajectory, a realistic figure against the annual average of 162 minor site completions from 2011 to 2020. Taking all sources of supply in the plan period into account – completions, commitments and windfalls – the strategic allocations contribute, during the plan period, only around 39% of the total: 11,785 dwellings out of a total of 30,056. In part this is because the Council has been effective, in the plan period up to now, in facilitating and encouraging housing delivery through neighbourhood plans. In addition, a minimum of 12% net of the total housing requirement will be provided on sites of no larger than one hectare, in accordance with paragraph 68(a) of the NPPF.

202. It is therefore clear that the housing supply is drawn from a range of different kinds of site which are relevant to different parts of the market and attractive to different developers, and the Plan is not excessively dependent on a small number of strategic sites, although they will obviously play a very important part in meeting housing need.

203. The calculation of the 5 year supply of housing is set out in document PSD44. Since the start of the plan period, there has been a shortfall of 922 homes against the Plan's housing requirement that will need to be added to the requirement over the next five years, in accordance with Planning Practice Guidance. There has not been an under-delivery of housing in the last three years, so the appropriate buffer to apply in the calculation at this time is 5%. Taking these factors into account, against the stepped housing requirement set out in STRAT2, as modified by MM5, document PSD44 indicates that there would be 5.35 years' supply in 2020/21, rising to 7.2 years' supply in 2024/25.

204. To assess the robustness of the housing supply position in both the 5 year period and over the plan period, the Council has considered various scenarios: a year's delay in the commencement of all the strategic site allocations; the impact of the removal of each individual strategic allocation; and the position if a site were removed and all other strategic allocation trajectories were delayed by one year. The tables in documents PSD59 and PSD59.1 show that in all cases the Council would still expect to meet its housing requirement and maintain a 5-year housing land supply, though obviously with a much smaller margin of comfort. Whilst these scenarios are relatively simple, they do demonstrate the robustness of the housing supply position.

205. The scenarios also demonstrate the importance of the headroom of 27% above the housing requirement of 23,550 dwellings referred to in Issue 1. It has been argued that the existence of this headroom, being in excess of the housing requirement, means that less land should be released from the Green Belt under the justification of exceptional circumstances. However, if the

headroom were lower, the Plan would be much less resilient in the face of potential delays to one or more of the strategic allocations. This is of particular concern in South Oxfordshire because the site allocations are large and critical to the Plan's delivery; they require infrastructure to be in place to enable development to proceed as anticipated, and in the case of Chalgrove there are other issues to resolve (see Issue 3). Without this size of contingency buffer in place, there would be a greater likelihood that infrastructure delivery problems and slippage would jeopardise the delivery of the plan and the adequate provision of much needed housing, threatening the 5 year supply position.

206. If more significant problems were to occur and the headroom were to prove insufficient, the obvious approach would be to review the plan but, on the evidence, it is not necessary either to insert a review trigger clause into the plan or to allocate reserve sites as a contingency.

207. **MM22** and **MM23** update Policy H1: Delivering New Homes and its supporting test with the latest housing supply figures. Policy H1 also addresses criteria for the location of new residential development and these are dealt with under Issue 8.

Conclusion on Issue 4

208. Subject to the main modifications referred to above, the evidence indicates that the Plan will provide adequately for the delivery of housing to meet the housing requirement, and that a 5 years' supply of homes will be maintained. The criteria in Policy H1 as modified will assist in identifying and bringing forward suitable land for housing.

Issue 5 – Whether the Plan's policies and provisions are viable and whether its infrastructure policies are sound

Introduction

209. The plan's spatial strategy and its housing and employment provision will require adequate infrastructure to make it effective. The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update (April 2020) (Document PSD27) focuses on the Plan's strategic allocations and is supported by an updated Financial Viability Assessment Report and associated documents (PSD52, PSD52.1 and PSD53). The Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update is a thorough document that contains a list of infrastructure requirements for the allocations. Not all the costs can be known, because the allocations are strategic and will need to be worked up in detail through masterplans, and some of the infrastructure is not fully designed and costed. This is inevitable with long term masterplans and strategic allocations, and does not indicate any defect in either the viability assessment or the plan.

Viability of the strategic sites and housing provision

210. The Financial Viability Assessment update report (document PSD52) appraised the viability of the strategic sites. The analysis included all physical and social infrastructure costs and affordable housing. It concluded that all the strategic sites are fully viable except for STRAT13: Land North of Bayswater Brook, which is marginally viable, in other words it generates a relatively low positive

residual land value due to substantial infrastructure costs and 50% affordable housing. The report however acknowledges that the landowners (of the larger part of this allocation) are intending to develop their own land and will therefore benefit from the substantial development profit. A further point is that the Council and County Council have been very cautious and have factored in very significant s106 infrastructure contributions including a 40% additional allowance for transport infrastructure projects that are at an early stage of conception; the report states that actual infrastructure costs may be significantly less and viability may therefore be under-estimated.[4]

211. The Financial Viability Assessment Update has taken into account proposed new policy DES11, introduced by MM71 (see Issue 8) which seeks more stringent reductions in carbon emissions from new development. The Berinsfield and Bayswater allocations are both viable with the initial 40% requirement set out in Policy DES11, but the later requirements in 2026 (50%) and 2030 (100%) have the potential to make these sites unviable against current costs and technologies. However, the report points out that the cost of low-carbon technology in 10 years' time is hard to predict, and that economies of scale could potentially push costs lower. This is a subject which needs to be kept under review.

212. The report concludes that the Plan's strategy is viable, and that its policies, including its affordable housing policies, do not undermine the viability of residential development on the whole within the District. It should be noted that where viability issues arise which could prevent delivery, the explanatory text to both Policy DES11: Carbon Reduction and Policy H9: Affordable Housing indicates that a relaxation argument may be made (in the case of DES11 this is an addition to the text in response to the main modifications consultation: see Issue 8).

Transport infrastructure

213. The set of documents comprising the Evaluation of Transport Impacts (documents TRA06 to TRA06.6.1) examined various development scenarios and their transport impacts, and the evaluation underpins the range of transport improvements required by the Plan in connection with the allocations.

214. The success of the Housing Infrastructure Fund bid will bring about early delivery of a new crossing of the River Thames between Culham and Didcot, a bypass of Clifton Hampden, capacity enhancements to the A4130, and a new 'Science Bridge', which will enable STRAT8, STRAT9 and STRAT10 to proceed. They are part of a wider highway strategy to support the delivery of housing growth in the wider Didcot Garden Town area and to mitigate the impact of existing, approved and allocated developments.

215. Substantial investment has been secured under the Local Growth Fund for cycle network improvements and the expansion of Didcot Parkway Station car

[4] The report also considers that, because the strategic sites will make significant contributions to infrastructure through site-specific planning obligations, it will not be appropriate to charge CIL on them (PSD52.1, page 74).

park and further funds have been secured. In addition, as referred to above in connection with the Spatial Strategy, the Housing and Growth Deal has secured £215m of investment towards affordable housing and infrastructure improvements.

216. Policy TRANS1b: Supporting Strategic Transport Investment sets out the ways in which the Council intends to support such investment, and to ensure the policy is fully up to date, **MM51** adds the schemes that are linked to the Housing Infrastructure Funding to the list of supported projects. It also adds support for the re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line for passenger traffic which has the potential to provide an additional sustainable transport choice for sites STRAT11 and STRAT12.

217. Policy INF1: Infrastructure Provision provides a strategy for infrastructure delivery within South Oxfordshire, developed in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council who are responsible for education and highways. It requires new development to be supported by appropriate infrastructure, both on-site and off-site. Infrastructure required as a consequence of development, and provision for its maintenance, will be secured through planning conditions, obligations and other agreements and funding through the Community Infrastructure Levy. A clarification is inserted into Policy INF1 by **MM49** to the effect that where external forward funding for infrastructure necessary for development has been secured (for example from the Housing Infrastructure Fund), it will be recovered from the development. This is to assist the County Council to recycle funding to help support other future transport improvements, and is necessary to ensure an effective policy towards the provision of infrastructure.

218. As referred to above in Issue 2, in 2017 the National Infrastructure Commission published recommendations on progressing growth on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and in September 2018, the government announced its preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway road proposal. There are two potential corridor options for the routing of the Expressway around Oxford, broadly either north/west of Oxford, or south/east of Oxford. Policy TRANS1a indicates that the Council will work with various transport infrastructure providers to plan for and mitigate the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway; however, the Arc includes other potential projects than the Expressway, so to ensure the policy is wholly relevant, **MM50** alters TRANS1a to refer to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Safeguarding and the Watlington Edge Road

219. Policy TRANS3: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Transport Schemes lists the schemes for which land is safeguarded, and the safeguarding maps are included in Appendix 5 of the Plan. One of the schemes in TRANS3 is referred to as a bypass for Watlington, but is otherwise known as the Watlington Edge Road. It would form an alternative route round Watlington for the B4009 and would be funded through agreements with site developers, S106 contributions, and Oxfordshire Growth Deal funding.

220. The proposal for the road has been led by Watlington Parish Council and it is included in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan (August 2018). The plan allocates housing land to partly fund and facilitate delivery of the road.

However, the safeguarding for the route is not included in the adjoining Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan (April 2019). The examiner to the latter did not reach any firm conclusions on the road, regarding it as a matter for the examination into the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, in other words the current examination.

221. The B4009 runs through the centre of Watlington. It has a junction with the M40 only 3 miles to the east which brings heavy traffic, including large vehicles, through its narrow streets, its awkward junctions and corners and past its historic buildings and constricted pavements. Transport evidence for the made Watlington Neighbourhood Plan indicates that, at peak times, some 80% of traffic is through traffic. The edge road would bring very substantial improvements to conditions in the centre of Watlington. It would also improve air quality, diverting traffic away from the Watlington Air Quality Management Area. It would help to mitigate the transport impact of strategic development in the Local Plan, particularly that at Chalgrove Airfield, and the housing proposed in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan.

222. Although the road is not included in the Local Transport Plan (2016) the County Council consider it to be consistent with the goals as well as the general objectives and policies of Local Transport Plan 4. By the nature of the safeguarding it is evident that it would not be designed as a major highway, but it would be beneficial to the local environment in Watlington, would further a number of the Plan's housing, environmental and heritage objectives, and would have strategic as well as local purposes, in that it would assist in mitigating the impact of strategic sites, especially Chalgrove.

223. The historic buildings of Pyrton would be well away from the route of the edge road with a considerable amount of intervening greenspace which could be reinforced through the design of the road, and the safeguarding has been realigned so that it is further from the setting of the Manor in Pyrton. The position of the B4009 through Shirburn would be unchanged as would the setting of Shirburn Castle.

224. In all the circumstances, there are good, sound and evidence-based reasons for the plan to include the safeguarding for the road.

Promoting sustainable transport and mitigating the transport implications of development

225. Policies TRANS2, TRANS4, TRANS5, TRANS6 and TRANS7 promote sustainable means of transport and accessibility, seek transport assessments and transport plans in certain circumstances, set out how the transport aspects of development will be considered, support improved rail services and facilities, and establish criteria for development involving lorry movements. These are all sound and consistent with both the NPPF and the Plan's sustainability objectives.

Conclusion on Issue 5

226. Subject to the main modifications described above, the plan's policies, proposals and strategic allocations are viable and its infrastructure policies are sound.

Issue 6 – Whether the Plan provides appropriately for the housing needs of all parts of the community

Introduction

227. Part 6 of Policy H1 states that the Council will support development which provides for the residential needs of all parts of the community. The plan then addresses particular housing needs under subsequent policy headings. These are discussed below.

Affordable housing

228. Policy H9 sets out the affordable housing requirements for new developments. For all major developments (10 or more homes), the policy seeks housing sites to deliver 40% affordable housing on site. For proposals on sites adjacent to Oxford, the affordable housing contribution would be 50%. For sites in the AONBs, proposals for 5 or more homes will provide a financial contribution equivalent to 40% affordable housing provision, but for sites of 10 or more, this would be provided on site.

229. The 2014 SHMA (documents HOU05 & HOU05.1) assesses South Oxfordshire's need for affordable housing at 386 dpa.[5] The figure is calculated using sound and widely used methodologies. With a requirement of 40% on major developments, South Oxfordshire's housing requirement would go a long way to meet affordable housing need, particularly when sources of housing supply other than the strategic allocations are taken into account. The calculation of affordable housing need does not therefore support an increase in the overall housing requirement.

230. It has been argued that sites released from the Green Belt should deliver an even higher proportion of affordable homes than that indicated in the Plan in order to provide the exceptional circumstances for their release. However, this would not be appropriate. There are two points to make here. Firstly, market housing and affordable housing are equally important in meeting housing need, and if enough market housing is provided it will have a moderating effect on housing costs and hence the need to provide for affordable housing. Secondly, the delivery of affordable housing is mainly achieved through market-led housing without cost to the public purse and, to deliver affordable housing at all, market-led schemes need to be viable.

231. The requirement for 40% affordable housing is a continuation of Core Strategy (document ALP02) Policy CSH3, and the Annual Monitoring Report (document OCD2.1) demonstrates that it can be viably delivered. The requirement of 50% on the sites adjacent to Oxford is consistent with the provisions of the Oxford Local Plan. Paragraph ES18 of the Financial Viability Assessment Report of June 2020 (document PSD52) states that, having regard to the cumulative impact of the emerging Local Plan policies, the strategic sites are all viable with 40% affordable housing and 50% for sites adjacent to Oxford; Community Infrastructure Levy would not be charged because these sites

[5] This is aside from the affordable housing component of Oxford City's unmet housing needs.

would make significant contributions to infrastructure through site-specific planning obligations.

232. The Plan therefore seeks to maximise the level of affordable housing while ensuring housing delivery is still viable given the expected levels of significant infrastructure required.

233. Part 2(iii) of Policy H9 sets out the mix for affordable rented and social rented homes and contains an expectation for 25% other affordable routes to home ownership, thus enabling schemes to accord with paragraph 64 of the NPPF. **MM27** provides an exception to the mix in the case of Berinsfield Garden Village, which is discussed above in connection with Policy STRAT10 and MM14.

234. The criteria in Policy H9 for the application of the affordable housing policy do not entirely accord with the NPPF as they include residential floorspace figures. MM27 brings the criteria into line with the NPPF.

235. In addition, MM27 indicates that self-contained dwelling units falling into Use Class C2, where there is a net gain of 10 or more dwellings, should provide 40% affordable housing. This is necessary for clarity and also for effectiveness, to ensure consistency of approach between residential schemes falling within different use classes. The argument that this would put certain types of specialist housing model at a disadvantage is not convincing on the evidence and in any case the Plan provides a facility, as discussed in Issue 5, for viability considerations to be taken into account. The Plan makes it clear at paragraph 5.46 that Policy H9 is the starting position, and that the exact amount of affordable housing will be determined by negotiation, with departures supported where they are backed by robust evidence, including viability assessments where appropriate.

Exception Sites and Entry Level Housing Schemes

236. As submitted, Policy H10 only addresses rural exception sites, in other words the circumstances referred to in paragraph 77 of the NPPF. **MM28** adds to the policy by allowing for entry-level housing schemes with criteria in accordance with paragraph 71 of the NPPF.

237. As regards rural exception sites, the submitted policy is ineffective because it says that schemes on these sites "may be permitted" "in exceptional circumstances", whereas the policy itself sets out the circumstances under which such development will be permitted. The policy also refers to sites "within villages" whereas rural exception sites are normally outside settlements, being exceptions to policies of countryside restraint for which planning permission would not normally be granted. MM28 addresses these issues and also clarifies the policy criteria in respect of their impact and location.

Housing mix

238. Policy H11: Housing Mix seeks a mix of dwelling types and sizes to meet the needs of current and future households and requires all affordable housing and at least 15% of market housing to be designed to meet the standards for

accessible and adaptable dwellings. This is justified on demographic evidence. However, criterion 4 of the policy requires at least 3% of market housing to be designed for wheelchair accessible dwellings. This is inconsistent with Planning Practice Guidance in respect of the optional technical standards for housing; this states that policies for wheelchair accessible homes should be applied only to those dwellings where the local authority is responsible for allocating or nominating a person to live in that dwelling. **MM29** therefore deletes the requirement. It also clarifies the size of site to which accessible and adaptable dwellings will be sought and removes the inflexible requirement that the mix of housing should be "in general conformity with" the Council's latest evidence on housing mix, replacing it with "should have regard to". This is necessary because the Council's evidence on housing mix is not in itself an examined development plan document.

239. Criterion 5 of Policy H11 requires 1 and 2 bed market housing dwellings, and all affordable dwellings, to be designed to meet the Nationally Described Space Standards. There is evidence that a substantial proportion of small properties within the market sector fall below the nationally described space standards (document HOU03.6). The policy aims to improve the space available in new dwellings because the smallest properties are most likely to be fully occupied and may also be rented privately to more vulnerable households. The policy represents a reasonable approach to ensure that small and affordable dwellings offer adequate space standards.

Custom build and self-build

240. Policy H12 deals with this subject. The evidence in document IC02A shows that permissions for these dwellings were granted at a steady rate of between 38 and 79 dwellings between April 2016 and October 2019. This was consistently lower than the number of entries on the Self-build and Custom-build Register, but some of these may have been aspirational because there are no entry conditions or registration fee. Policy H12 expressly supports such projects; it seeks 3% of developable plots to be made available for this purpose on strategic allocations; and it refers to their provision, where appropriate, through neighbourhood plans. There is no reason to conclude that the policy will not be effective, but its effectiveness can be monitored and future policy adjustments can be considered if they prove necessary.

Specialist accommodation for older people

241. The 2014 SHMA (documents HOU05 & HOU05.1) recognised the need to provide specialist housing for older people. A key driver of change in the housing market up to 2031 is expected to be the growth in the population of older persons, with strong growth in the oldest age groups (85 and over).

242. Despite the evidence, Policy H13: Specialist Housing for Older People is not positive enough to enable the issue to be addressed effectively. It states that the Council will seek such housing as a proportion of dwellings on major development sites, but qualifies this by saying that this will be subject to identified local need, and otherwise states that the Council will identify locations through its housing strategy. Given the evidence of need for both housing generally and for specialist accommodation for older people, it is inappropriate to require evidence of need to support the provision of individual

schemes, and the policy does not sufficiently recognise the role of private sector developers and operators in this field to bring forward suitable sites for this type of housing. **MM30** replaces the requirements in Policy H13 with a positive policy which encourages the delivery of such housing in locations with good access to public transport and local facilities; encourages local communities to identify suitable sites through the neighbourhood planning process; and requires provision within the strategic housing allocations. More information is provided within the supporting text. In addition, MM23 in respect of Policy H1 allows for specialist housing for older people on unallocated sites. In combination, these modifications, which are in the interests of soundness and effectiveness, create a positive environment for bringing forward specialist housing for older people.

Provision for gypsies, travellers, travelling showpeople and boat dwellers

243. The Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (2017) (document HOU14) identified a need (in the period to 2017 to 2033) for 9 additional pitches for households that meet the planning definition of gypsies and travellers. Additionally, the assessment identified a need of between 0 to 5 pitches for households where it could not be determined if they still met the planning definition (unknown) and recommended 1 additional pitch was needed. The Plan responds by seeking 10 plots in part 1 of Policy H14: 4 pitches for gypsies and travellers at Didcot North East (carried over from the Core Strategy), 3 pitches on Land adjacent to Culham Science Centre (STRAT9) and 3 pitches at Chalgrove Airfield (STRAT7).[6]

244. The Assessment also identifies a possible additional requirement (whilst no longer a requirement to include in a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment) for an additional 8 pitches for households that do not meet the planning definition (in other words they are non-travelling). To address these needs and any additional need resulting from determining the planning status of the unknown households, part 2 of the policy allows for new pitches for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople subject to certain criteria, safeguards existing gypsy and traveller sites and allows for the extension of existing sites where possible to meet the needs of existing residents and their families.

245. The way part 2 of the policy is written, it is unclear as to whether these criteria apply to the sites and circumstances referred to in part 1 or whether they are intended to evaluate other sites that are brought forward. **MM31** clarifies the position by stating that the criteria relate to additional pitches not set out in part 1 of the policy. It also corrects erroneous policy cross references, and deletes criteria which require compliance with some other plan policies, which are unnecessary because the plan must be read as a whole. The modification is required for the policy to be effective.

246. **MM23** (also referred to in Issue 4) adds to part 6 of Policy H1 by making it clear that proposals for new residential caravan and mobile homes sites to

[6] Policy H14 of the submission Plan contains erroneous policy references (see MM31). These are the correct ones.

accommodate people who do not meet the planning definition for gypsies and travellers, as well as boat dwellers, will be considered against the site criteria in Policy H1. This modification is required for consistency of approach with other residential development, in terms of location criteria, and ensures that the plan's policies are effective in combination with each other.

247. Part 1 of Policy H14 also requires the safeguarding of existing authorised sites and this is expanded upon in Policy H15, which sets out the criteria that would need to be met before permitting the loss of an authorised and permanent site for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople. However, the criteria lack strength because they do not ensure that any replacement pitch is of equal or better quality, and do not relate the need for the pitch to the overall need for traveller pitches in the District. **MM32** remedies this and is necessary for effectiveness.

248. The Accommodation Assessment (2017) states that there is no need for additional sites to be identified for travelling showpeople in South Oxfordshire. But part 2 of Policy H14 would facilitate the provision of such sites, subject to the policy criteria, if the need were to arise.

249. Subject to the above modifications, the plan provides adequately for the identified need for additional pitches for gypsies and travellers who meet the planning definition; allows for the expansion of sites which will enable household needs to be met; facilitates the provision of additional accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople to meet the other potential needs identified in the Accommodation Assessment; and ensures consistency of approach with other housing development, in respect of location criteria, for people who do not meet the planning definition for gypsies and travellers, and for boat dwellers.

Conclusion on Issue 6

250. Subject to the main modifications discussed above, the Plan makes appropriate provision for the housing needs of all parts of the community.

Issue 7 – Whether the Plan provides appropriately for business, employment, retail, town centre and community needs

Introduction

251. This Issue addresses overall employment land need and provision as well as retail, town centre and community needs but it does not deal with every policy relating to these subjects; only those requiring modification.

Employment land need, provision and location

252. Chapter 6 of the Plan deals with employment and the District's economy. Oxfordshire is one of the strongest economies in the UK. It has a number of important clusters of research-based, high value businesses across different sectors. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment forecasts an increase of 11,455 jobs in South Oxfordshire from 2011 to 2031, and the South Oxfordshire Employment Land Review Addendum (2017) predicts an increase of 12,403 jobs from 2011 to 2033. A pro-rata extrapolation of the Employment

Land Review calculation suggests a need of between 34.7 ha and 37.5 ha of additional employment land in the District from 2011 to 2034.

253. Policy EMP1 establishes the range of 34.7 ha to 37.5 ha as the employment land requirement, and goes on to identify 47.2 ha of employment land, located at Didcot, the strategic allocations at and adjacent to Culham Science Centre, Berinsfield, Chalgrove and Grenoble Road, the market towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford, and Crowmarsh Gifford.

254. An adjustment needs to be made to the Plan's employment land requirement because of the extension of the plan period to 2035. In addition, evidence put to the examination from those representing interests in employment land, together with evidence from the market towns, suggests that demand for employment land might be in excess of the amount referred to in the Plan, and in certain instances, such as Thame, there may be a need to compensate for land lost to other uses through planning permissions and the exercise of permitted development rights. **MM38** therefore changes the employment requirement in Policy EMP1 to 39.1 ha and expresses the figure as a minimum, with an increase in the employment allocation at Thame to a minimum of 3.5 ha (see also MM42). Expressing the requirement as a minimum allows for additional provision to meet demand and compensate for loss where appropriate.

255. Including other adjustments to update the figures, MM38 identifies land for 47.94 ha of employment land. This represents a 22% buffer over the identified minimum requirement of 39.1 ha which ensures adequate provision of employment land with sufficient flexibility to avoid under-provision in the event of any delay in the implementation of any of the employment allocations.

256. Policy EMP2 seeks a range of different types of business premises including flexible space and premises for small and medium sized businesses. It has been suggested that the Plan's approach to employment land lacks a strategic employment site, but the Oxford Business Park and Oxford Science Park are just beyond the District boundary in Oxford City, and Milton Park, in the Vale of White Horse District, is also very close and is one of the largest business parks in Europe. There has been effective joint working between South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District, and Core Policy 6 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 identifies 28 ha of employment land at Milton Park, of which 6.5 ha is to meet the cross-boundary employment land needs of Didcot. Taken in this wider context, the Plan's approach towards the location and type of employment land is sound.

257. Policy EMP3 seeks to retain employment land to support economic growth and maintain a balance of employment and housing within settlements. It contains criteria to assess proposals involving the loss of such land. Criterion (iii) requires that a change of use should not lower the employment capacity of the District below that estimated to meet projected need. This would be very difficult to ascertain, leading to unnecessary argument; in any case, the viability requirement in criterion (i) and the marketing requirement in criterion (ii) should be sufficient to demonstrate whether the site is suitable for continuing employment use. Part 3 of the policy seeks to address the

circumstances where changes of use might be acceptable because of the effect of the use on living conditions, but it is complex and rather difficult to follow.

258. **MM39** therefore modifies Policy EMP3 by deleting criterion (iii) and by replacing part 3 of the policy with a new criterion which would allow for changes of use where the development would bring about significant improvements to the living conditions of nearby residents, or to the environment, taking into account whether there were reasonable prospects of mitigating the impacts of the existing employment use. This achieves the same effect as the original policy in a clearer way. Mixed use including employment use would be sought in such schemes. These modifications are required for effectiveness.

259. A number of policies set out new employment land requirements for individual settlements including Didcot (EMP4), Henley-on-Thames (EMP5), Thame (EMP6), Wallingford (EMP7), Crowmarsh Gifford (EMP8) and Chalgrove (EMP9). The figures and detailed text for the areas now require updating in the interests of effectiveness and this is achieved respectively by **MM40**, **MM41**, **MM42**, **MM43** and **MM44** and **MM45**. MM42 inserts the larger employment land requirement for Thame into Policy EMP6. MM44 also deletes a requirement for the timescale for the submission of the Crowmarsh Gifford Neighbourhood Plan because this is outside the Local Plan's control.

Town centres, town centre uses and community facilities

260. The Retail and Leisure Needs Assessments (documents ECO10, ECO10.1 and ECO10.2) and the South Oxfordshire District Retail Needs Update (2017) (documents ECO12 and ECO12.1) considered the qualitative and quantitative capacity for growth and change in retail provision across the District, and set out recommendations to inform the Council's retail strategy over the plan period. Based on the Retail Needs Update, the submitted Plan provides for 25,670 square metres (net) of comparison retail floorspace and 4,500 square metres of convenience goods floorspace to 2034. **MM73** raises the convenience retail requirement to 26,640 square metres (net) to account for the extension of the plan period to 2035. The strategic allocations have their own additional convenience requirements to serve their developments. The various studies took into account trends in retailing including internet shopping and click and collect services.

261. The regulatory context for retailing and town centre uses changed notably on 1 September 2020, when the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force which made changes to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. In particular, the new regulations introduced Use Class E, Commercial, Business and Service, encompassing former Class A1 (Shops), Class A2 (Financial and professional services), Class A3 (Restaurants and cafes), and Class B1 (Business).

262. These changes are of importance to Chapter 10 of the Plan, which contains policies that seek to ensure the vitality of town centres. **MM72**, **MM74** and **MM76** respond to these changes by modifying the explanatory text, Policy TC2: Retail Hierarchy and Policy TC5: Primary Shopping Areas respectively to allow for Class E uses within the town centre boundaries and to protect Class E

uses on the ground floor within Primary Shopping Areas. Policy TC2: Retail Hierarchy is re-named Policy TC2: Town Centre Hierarchy. These modifications take into account the changes to the Use Classes Order whilst also making positive provision for town centre uses in accordance with the NPPF, as well as protecting town centres and their primary frontages, and they are required to ensure that the policies remain sound.

263. Both Policy TC2: Retail Hierarchy (now Policy TC2: Town Centre Hierarchy: see above) and Policy TC3: Comparison Goods Floorspace Requirements require proposals of over 500 square metres for retail development outside town centres to submit retail impact assessments. This remains a relevant threshold because it relates to the size of many small convenience stores, for example those connected with filling stations. However, it is recognised that changing from a former B1 business use of any size to a former A1 retail use no longer amounts to development, and vice versa, whether within or outside a town centre. MM74 therefore makes it clear that impact assessments appropriate to the use only apply where planning permission is required, and **MM75** in relation to Policy TC3 indicates that the 500 square metre threshold may be modified by the Council in response to the latest evidence. Some minor wording changes have been made for consistency in response to the main modifications consultation.

264. The same changes to the Use Classes Order also created new Use Class F.1, Learning and non-residential institutions, and Use Class F.2, Local Community. Policy CF1: Safeguarding Community Facilities seeks to protect essential community facilities or services, but the intention of the policy is to span more uses than those included within Use Classes F.1 and F.2: for example, the sui generis uses of drinking establishments, cinemas, concert, dance and bingo halls, and theatres. This is a reasonable and sound approach so, to ensure that the scope of the policy is clear, **MM77** adds an explanatory paragraph to Policy CF1 setting out the activities to which it applies.

Community employment plans

265. Policy EMP10 requires all new development to demonstrate how opportunities for local employment and training can be created, and seeks to maximise opportunities for sourcing local produce, suppliers and services during construction and operation. It requires community employment plans to be submitted for major development sites which will include matters such as local procurement. However, evidence demonstrates that South Oxfordshire, and indeed Oxfordshire generally, are important drivers of the national economy with national and international connections and low unemployment relative to other areas. They are not islands within which preference must be given to sourcing employees and business inputs. Businesses and other activities in the District must be able to source the best resources wherever they arise. Training is important, but favouring local procurement and preferentially recruiting from local workers means effectively putting businesses and workers elsewhere at a disadvantage. In terms of the national economy, a contract is just as important to a company and its workers wherever they are based, and a job is just important to the person who is recruited, wherever they live.

266. For development to be granted planning permission, it is not necessary for the local planning authority to require the submission of a community employment

plan. A condition requiring this would not be necessary or fairly and reasonably related to the development and would not meet the tests in paragraph 56 of the NPPF. Similarly a planning obligation under s106 would not meet the tests in Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010. The NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. The requirements in Policy EMP10 would amount to additional burdens on development contrary to the NPPF. **MM46** deletes the policy in the interests of soundness.

Development in rural areas

267. Policy EMP11: Development in the Countryside and Rural Areas requires modification in the interests of effectiveness because it needs to reflect the objective to support sustainable growth in rural areas, rather than the open countryside. **MM47** changes the title and text of the policy to reflect this and also deletes an erroneous reference to development within the built-up areas of towns and villages, a subject dealt with elsewhere in the Plan. The wording relating to growth and expansion in new buildings has also been deleted, since this related to towns and villages and was not intended to refer to development in the countryside. This is a wording change to the consultation version of MM47.

Retention of visitor accommodation

268. EMP14: Retention of Visitor Accommodation resists the loss of such sites except where two criteria are both met. The first, in summary, is where the business is no longer viable, and alternatives have been fully explored. The second is that there should be no adverse effect on the tourist industry, the local community and the local economy. The first criterion is effective but the second creates an unnecessary additional hurdle when it has already been demonstrated that the business is not viable, and it would also be very difficult to substantiate in practice. **MM48** deletes this part of the requirement in the interest of effectiveness.

Conclusion on Issue 7

269. Subject to the main modifications described above, the Plan provides adequately, and in the right locations, for business, employment, retail, town centre and community needs.

Issue 8 – Whether the Plan's policies on design, environmental issues and the control of development are sound

Introduction

270. This section covers a range of policies including development density, quality and sustainability, the control of residential development, environmental protection and pollution, landscape, the countryside and green infrastructure, and the historic environment. Policies not referred to below are sound. Only those policies requiring modification are mentioned.

Residential densities and the efficient use of land

271. STRAT5: Residential Densities establishes minimum net densities for the towns, villages and strategic allocations with the aim of making the best use of land, appearing to allow for exceptions in very limited circumstances. The policy is backed up by an investigation of higher density areas in the District and some exercises in illustrating higher density residential typologies. However, the policy has little flexibility to deal with different site and contextual circumstances. In addition, its evidence base does not show convincingly that the policy would provide adequately for a range of house and plot types to meet all needs of society in accordance with the housing policies in the Plan, or that adequate provision could be made for private gardens, car parking and storage. It also falls short of demonstrating that heritage assets and their setting, and the distinctive character of the towns and villages, would be protected.

272. To ensure that the policy is sound, and is consistent with the Plan's other policies, **MM8** deletes STRAT5 as submitted and replaces it with a new version that requires development to optimise the use of land, lists a number of important factors that will influence density, and identifies locations where higher densities of more than 45 dwellings per hectare are expected. A new definition of net density is included in the glossary; whilst there are always different interpretations of density, the definition is reasonable and takes a commonly used approach. MM8 also explains the role of masterplans and design and access statements in making the optimal use of sites, and refers to the need to have careful regard to local character and environmental and amenity factors, including AONBs, heritage assets and important landscape, habitats and townscape. However, MM8 recognises that, given the scale of the strategic allocations, they are likely to create their own character, and this will help to facilitate innovative design, layout, construction and low carbon development. In addition, as discussed in Issue 3, modifications to each of the strategic allocation policies describe where higher and lower densities are expected and these are illustrated graphically on the concept plans.

273. Policy DES8 seeks the efficient use of resources. The majority of the policy is sound except for criterion (i) which applies a density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare taking account of local circumstances. It is not clear how this would operate in practice, for example whether local circumstances would allow densities lower than 30 dwellings per hectare or whether they would only be relevant above that level. However, this part of the policy is rendered unnecessary having regard to the change made to STRAT5 by MM8. **MM68** therefore alters criterion (i) to require densities in accordance with STRAT5.

274. These modifications as a whole will help to protect local character and will enable a range of types of housing development to be brought forward for different markets and needs, consistent with the NPPF. Moreover, the ability to include larger gardens and more incidental open space in development can support the plan's wellbeing and biodiversity objectives and facilitate a better mix of housing. The evidence indicates that the revised policy will not have a significant effect on housing delivery; it would not reduce the capacities of any of the strategic or allocated sites.

The quality of development

275. Policy STRAT4: Strategic Development sets out comprehensive requirements for development proposals on the strategic allocations and these are discussed under Issue 3.

276. Policy DES1: Delivering High Quality Development seeks high quality design and states that planning permission will only be granted where proposals meet the South Oxfordshire Design Guide's design objectives and principles. However, the Design Guide is not a development plan document, and has not been examined, so the policy cannot require development to be in accordance with it. **MM63** therefore deletes this reference in the interests of soundness and replaces it with a set of design principles. Policy DES1 also seeks a coordinated masterplan for sites with similar delivery timetables, and for clarity MM63 indicates that this applies to adjacent or closely related sites; this is a necessary wording change following the main modifications consultation. MM63 also deletes the reference to a constraints and opportunities plan and **MM65** adds this requirement to Policy DES3: Design and Access Statements where it belongs. Additional references to the public realm and public art are included in the supporting text in response to the deletion of DES7: Public Art (see below). For clarity, **MM64** moves Policy DES1's reference to local character to Policy DES2: Enhancing Local Character, where it is more relevant.

277. To ensure the policy is fully effective, **MM66** adds the principles of natural surveillance and active street frontages to Policy DES4: Masterplans for Allocated Sites and Major Development.

278. Policy DES7: Public Art requires public art in all major development, in other words residential sites of 10 or more dwellings and developments larger than 0.5 hectares. The policy is unnecessary to require development to go ahead and the threshold is also very low. Public art will not be beneficial in all cases and is not universally welcomed by the public. It is a cost on development without necessarily bringing benefits, and there are opportunity costs; for example, greater benefits might instead be achieved in the public realm by higher quality detailing, planting, floorscapes and so on. In the interests of soundness, **MM67** deletes the policy and, as discussed above, MM63 includes new guidance on public art in the supporting text to Policy DES1: Delivering High Quality Development.

Sustainable design, carbon reduction, the efficient use of resources and renewable energy

279. Following its declaration of a climate emergency, the Council is strongly committed to sustainable and low or zero carbon development and wants to ensure that the plan is effective in reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change. **MM2** adds a statement to the Strategic Objectives supporting lower energy use, an increase in renewable energy use, and growth in locations that help reduce the need to travel. **MM3** and **MM4** adds a similar requirement and statement to the Spatial Strategy. These are consistent with the main modifications to the strategic allocations discussed above which require low carbon development and renewable energy, and are necessary for soundness and consistency.

280. DES9 requires all new development to seek to minimise carbon and energy impacts in line with nationally adopted standards. Part 3 of the policy addresses buildings or infrastructure which promote high levels of sustainability. **MM69** brings its wording into line with the latest NPPF and adds that proposals must demonstrate that they are seeking to limit greenhouse emissions through location, building orientation, design, landscape and planting in accordance with Policy DES11 (see below) and DES8 (see above). Part 2 is expanded to include some of the measures required to address adaptation to climate change. These changes are necessary to ensure consistency with the NPPF and with other parts of the Plan, as modified, notably the greater emphasis of the Plan on reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change.

281. DES10: Renewable Energy encourages schemes for renewable and low carbon energy generation at all levels, but this could be construed as meaning only free standing schemes. **MM70** clarifies the policy to make it clear that such schemes are encouraged within development. The supporting text is also clarified to indicate that the Council will support the inclusion of connection readiness for decentralised energy networks and the use of decentralised energy sources in development.

282. **MM71** introduces a new policy, Policy DES11: Carbon Reduction because policies DES9 and DES10 do not fully address carbon reduction and renewable energy in construction. Policy DES11 progressively tightens carbon emission standards against a 2013 Building Regulations baseline for residential development until 31 March 2030 when zero carbon is required. Separate reductions are required for non-residential development. An energy statement is required to demonstrate compliance with the policy. The supporting text states that the policy will be reviewed in the light of any future legislation or national guidance and allows for variations in exceptional circumstances for viability reasons (see Issue 5). For clarity and effectiveness, the policy wording has been changed following main modifications consultation to remove a statement seeking higher requirements than future legislation or guidance (these being unknown, this would introduce uncertainty into the policy) and to introduce the review and viability references referred to above.

283. The policy takes a holistic approach towards carbon emissions which can include both renewable energy and low carbon technologies as well as energy efficiency measures and is also generally consistent with Policy RE1 of the adopted Oxford Local Plan.

284. Added to the above points, it is also important to note that the Spatial Strategy, discussed under Issue 2, takes into account the need to locate development close to where need arises and in locations which limit travel, and its strategic allocations are large enough to accommodate a range of facilities and support public transport. The spatial strategy is therefore of key importance in addressing climate change.

285. The Plan as modified takes a sound and positive approach towards addressing climate change.

The control of residential development

286. Policy H1, discussed above in relation to housing supply, contains criteria for the location of new residential development. However, these are complex, difficult to follow and restrictive. MM22 and MM23 replace these with positive criteria that clearly establish the kinds of development that may take place on unallocated sites. Added to the list are entry level housing schemes, specialist housing for older people, development within towns and larger villages (moved from Policy H16), infilling and brownfield sites within smaller and other villages, redundant and disused buildings, and buildings of innovative or exceptional quality. MM23 also indicates that the residential development of previously developed land will be permitted within and adjacent to towns and larger and smaller villages, and supports opportunities to remediate land. These modifications are necessary for clarity and effectiveness, and to ensure consistency with the NPPF, and are linked to MM33 and Policy H16, discussed below. The references to entry level housing schemes and specialist housing for older people are also required for consistency with the policy modifications discussed below under Issue 6.

287. However, it has become clear from the main modifications consultation that, in moving the section on development in the towns and larger villages from Policy H16 to Policy H1, the reference to important open spaces and public views has been lost and there is no equivalent elsewhere in the plan. This wording has therefore been reinstated in Policy H1 as modified.

288. Policy H16: Infill Development and Redevelopment overlaps in scope with Policy H1 as submitted, and the policies create confusion through the use of the term "infill development" and "infilling". To make the Plan clearer, MM23 (see above) makes Policy H1 the focus for a range of criteria for the location of development, including development within towns and larger villages which was formerly within Policy H16.

289. That reduces the role of Policy H16 to one dealing with the development of land behind existing frontages or the placing of further dwellings behind existing dwellings, together with the restriction of development to infilling and redevelopment in smaller and other villages. The prescriptive infilling limits within the table in Policy H16 may not fit all the circumstances of the smaller villages and other villages and may act to prevent sustainable development. The policy is also not clear enough on the factors that will be taken into account in considering backland development. To make the policy effective, **MM33** addresses infilling in the smaller villages and other villages in part 1 of the policy; it dispenses with the table; and it gives greater clarity to the factors that will be considered in respect of backland development.

290. Policy H17: Subdivision and Conversion to Residential Occupation is inconsistent with national policy because it only permits such development within built-up areas, whereas NPPF paragraph 79 (d) allows subdivision of existing residential dwellings in the countryside. **MM34** corrects this and also removes unnecessary references to other considerations since the plan must be read as a whole.

291. Policy H18: Replacement Dwellings contains criteria for the assessment of this form of development, but criterion (iii) seeks the repair and restoration of unlisted buildings of interest in preference to replacement. Such buildings are

not defined, which could result in inconsistent outcomes. The protection of heritage assets is in any case covered by Policies ENV6 and ENV7 and there are other policies in the plan to encourage good design and protect local character and distinctiveness. **MM35** therefore deletes criterion (iii). In the interests of effectiveness, it also makes clear that the policy applies to locations outside the built-up areas of settlements – rather than outside the settlement limits, which are not defined on the Policies Map.

292. Policy H19: Re-use of Rural Buildings states that priority will be given to employment uses in order to support sustainable rural economic development, and planning permission will only be granted for residential use when other uses have been explored and found to be unacceptable. However, this approach is not found in Paragraph 79 of the NPPF, which allows for the residential conversion of such buildings as an exception to the general policy of avoiding isolated new dwellings in the countryside, so **MM36** deletes the policy.

293. Policy H21: Extensions to Dwellings sets out criteria for such development, but criterion (i), which deals with extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt, makes a distinction between dwellings inside and outside the larger and smaller villages which does not exist in the NPPF. It also requires conformity with Oxfordshire County Council parking standards and with the South Oxfordshire Design Guide, but these cannot carry the weight of development plan documents. In the interests of soundness **MM37** deletes criterion (i) and states that development should have regard to the parking standards and the Design Guide.

Environmental Protection and Pollution policies

294. Policy EP1: Air Quality lists requirements for development to protect public health from poor air quality. The policy seeks compliance with the Council's Developer Guidance Document and the Air Quality Action Plan, but these do not carry the weight of development plan documents, so in the interests of soundness **MM61** alters this to become a requirement to have regard to these documents.

295. Policy EP5: Minerals Safeguarding Areas indicates that where development in minerals safeguarding areas cannot be avoided, developers must demonstrate that all opportunities for mineral extraction have been fully explored. However, the policy does not reflect the wording of paragraph 204(d) of the NPPF, and it could potentially affect STRAT 10: Land at Berinsfield, and part of STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre, both of which are within Minerals Safeguarding Areas. **MM62** instead brings the policy into line with paragraph 204(d) of the NPPF, by encouraging developers to extract minerals prior to non-mineral development taking place where this is practical and environmentally feasible.

Landscape, the countryside and green infrastructure

296. The relationship of the strategic sites to the landscape, including the AONBs, is discussed under Issues 1, 2 and 3 in relation to the housing requirement, the spatial strategy and the site allocations.

297. Policy ENV1: Landscape and countryside sets out aims and criteria for protecting the AONB, the countryside and the landscape. Policy ENV1 is mostly effective but the second sentence of Part 2 refers to "valued" landscapes. This is unnecessary because the intention of this part of the policy is to protect the character of the landscape generally, and it could cause confusion with the meaning of that term in NPPF paragraph 170(a). The reference to the definition of hedgerows within the Hedgerow Regulations is too prescriptive since the aim is to retain hedgerows in general. To ensure the policy is effective, **MM52** removes the word "valued" and the reference to the Hedgerow Regulations.

298. **MM53** includes new supporting text of Policy ENV1 to encourage a net increase in tree canopy where possible, with the aim of making the policy consistent with the new carbon reduction policy DES11. This is subject to certain considerations such as heritage protection, landscape character, residential amenity, the need to make the best use of land, and habitat protection. This has been changed from the consultation version of MM53 which required all developments to include a wide range of large canopied trees, a policy requirement that would be impractical in many cases.

299. Biodiversity is discussed in Issues 1, 2 and 3 in relation to the housing requirement, the spatial strategy and the individual site allocations. Policies ENV2 and ENV3 address biodiversity on designated and non-designated sites respectively. Policy ENV2 is sound but Policy ENV3 is intended to apply to all sites, not just non-designated sites, so **MM54** deletes the reference to non-designated sites from the policy heading.

300. Policy ENV4 aims to protect watercourses. The policy's approach is generally sound, but the requirement for a buffer of 10m between development and the watercourses may not be achievable in every circumstance and may act to prevent beneficial development. In addition, it is disproportionate to require a construction management plan for all development next to a watercourse. **MM55** introduces flexibility into the policy and makes clear that construction management plans are only required for major development.

301. Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure in New Developments aims to protect and enhance the District's green infrastructure. However, it does not refer adequately to the role of green infrastructure in achieving biodiversity gain and in mitigating the effects of climate change. Its requirement to meet the standards within the Green Infrastructure Strategy is not sound because the strategy is not a development plan document. **MM56** corrects these points to ensure that the policy is fully effective.

302. Policy CF5: Open Space, Sport and Recreation in New Residential Development is largely sound, but it requires development to be in line with the standards in the Council's Open Space Study and Leisure Study and Sport England guidance. These standards do not carry the weight of a development plan policy, so to ensure the policy is sound, **MM78** alters the policy to say that development should have regard to them.

The protection of the historic environment

303. Policy ENV6: Historic Environment is a general policy relating to the protection and conservation of heritage assets, but Parts 1 and 3 are statements of intent as to what the Council will do and who they will work with. They reflect the Council's heritage strategy, but do not belong in the policy, and are not effective for development management purposes. **MM57** therefore moves these to the supporting text, and replaces them in the policy with criteria stating what is expected of development. Some of the wording in part 1 of the policy has been changed following the main modifications consultation to ensure consistency with the NPPF and with the remainder of the Plan's heritage section.

304. MM57 also requires applicants to describe the significance of the heritage asset, including any contribution made by their setting; this text is moved from Policy ENV8: Conservation Areas, because it applies generally to heritage assets and not solely to conservation areas. MM57 also introduces a new part to the policy addressing non-designated heritage assets to bring it into compliance with the NPPF.

305. Part 2 of Policy ENV7: Listed Buildings does not follow the NPPF because it appears to allow for demolition in "exceptional circumstances" and the mitigation of harm. Neither of these approaches are mentioned in paragraph 195 of the NPPF. In addition, the policy does not include the criteria in respect of substantial harm or total loss at NPPF 195 (a) to (d) and there is no section on less than substantial harm, as indicated in paragraph 196 of the NPPF. **MM58** deletes the parts of the policy that are not compliant with the NPPF and replaces them with policy text that addresses substantial harm and total loss, and less than substantial harm, in accordance with the wording in the NPPF.

306. Policy ENV8: Conservation Areas is sound, but part 5 contains requirements that are of relevance to all heritage assets, not just conservation areas, so it is deleted by **MM59** and re-inserted by MM57 into Policy ENV6. MM59 also introduces an additional statement into the supporting text concerning heritage assets at risk, in compliance with paragraph 185 of the NPPF.

307. Policy ENV10: Historic Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens and Historic Landscapes contains criteria governing development affecting these areas which do not fully reflect the NPPF's policies for conserving and enhancing the historic environment. **MM60** brings the wording into compliance with the NPPF.

Conclusion on Issue 8

308. Subject to the main modifications described above, the Plan's policies on design, environmental issues and the control of development are sound.

Overall Conclusion and Recommendation

309. The Plan has a number of deficiencies in respect of soundness for the reasons set out above, which mean that I recommend non-adoption of it as submitted, in accordance with Section 20(7A) of the 2004 Act. These deficiencies have been explained in the main issues set out above.

310. The Council has requested that I recommend main modifications to make the Plan sound and capable of adoption. I conclude that the duty to co-operate has been met and that with the recommended main modifications set out in the Appendix the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (as so re-named by MM1) satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Act and is sound.

Jonathan Bore

Inspector

This report is accompanied by an Appendix containing the Main Modifications.