Wantage and Grove Campaign Group

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Consultation March 2019

RESPONSE

1. This submission covers the following points:

   1.1. Information about the Wantage and Grove Campaign Group
      1. Who we are
      2. Where we are
      3. Our interest in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050

   1.2. Our feedback on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050

2. The Wantage and Grove Campaign Group

   2.1. **Who we are**
   The Wantage and Grove Campaign Group is a non-party-political group of over 1000 individuals who live in and around Wantage and Grove in Oxfordshire. We are not against any development in Wantage and Grove but:
   - Developments should be proportionate and sustainable; and
   - The infrastructure should enhance and improve quality of life for its residents.

   2.2. **Where we are**
   Wantage and Grove jointly comprised 7,635 households at the 2011 census. We are situated in the centre of the Vale of the White Horse. This is a predominantly rural area located in south-west Oxfordshire and is bounded to the north and the east by the River Thames and to the south by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Vale is located between the larger centres of Swindon, to the south-west; Oxford, to the north-east; Newbury, to the south; and Didcot, to the south-east.

   2.3. **Our interest in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050**
   As residents of the Vale of the White Horse, this plan affects us all.

3. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050

   3.1. **Foreword and Introduction**
   Although there is reference to the Local Plans prepared by the Oxfordshire Authorities, there is no mention of the plans prepared by the Growth Board including the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and the Oxfordshire Affordable Homes Programme or of the Strategic Transport plans prepared by the County Council.

Wantage and Grove Campaign Group - Response

There is also no link made between The Oxford-Cambridge Arc Joint Declaration between Government and local partners and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

3.2. **Discussion point 1 - Does the above draft vision meet your aspirations for the future of Oxfordshire? Are there any changes you would like to see to the vision?**
We believe that the draft vision is too general, it could relate to any part of the country. It should reflect Oxfordshire more – referring to Oxford University, AONB, green belt, historic and literary links, technological innovation and farming.
It should also ensure that all sectors of society are supported including specifically key workers so that they don't have to commute from out of county and should ensure that infrastructure (health services, education, leisure and transport) is available to meet all needs.
Finally it should refer to our proximity to London and the fact that a significant percentage of our residents commute to London for work and other activities.

3.3. **Discussion point 2 – Do you feel that we've identified the right aspirations for Oxfordshire? Where do you think the balance should lie in prioritising these aspirations?**
- **1. Protecting environmental quality**
- **2. Strong and healthy communities**
- **3. Support Economic growth**
- **4. Improve housing availability & affordability**
- **5. Improve connectivity and movement**

We believe that Aspirations 3-5 are part of the means of achieving Aspiration 2 and are not therefore, in themselves, aspirations. If they remain as aspirations then two further aspirations should be added:
- Ensuring delivery of substantial additional infrastructure ahead of the arrival of new communities
- Reduce carbon emissions by ensuring that all growth is carbon neutral.

The Joint Declaration states that
"We recognise the need to plan for and deliver substantial additional infrastructure ahead of the arrival of new communities, including necessary transport infrastructure, utilities, digital connectivity, health and education."
Therefore this should be included as an aspiration or objective in Oxfordshire 2050.
Furthermore, any growth for the future must reflect the impact of Climate Change and this should be included specifically in the aspirations.

3.4. **Discussion point 3 – Do you feel the draft objectives are appropriate for the plan? Are there any changes or other objectives that you would like to see? Should they be bolder? Or more specific?**

Draft Objective 1
To maintain and enhance the historic built and natural environment of the county through strategic investment and high quality design and to capitalise on the benefits these assets contribute to quality of life and economic success

Wantage and Grove Campaign Group - Response

We are not clear how it would be proposed to enhance the "historic built" environment. This should be clarified.

Also we have seen since the Strategic Housing Market Assessment was produced in 2014 that the new developments in Oxfordshire are not of high quality design nor of quality build. We would be very happy to see high quality design and build in the County but fail to see how this can be achieved, given the expected levels of investment. It is important that objectives are SMART and we look forward to seeing the metrics for this.

Draft Objective 2

To protect and enhance the County's distinctive landscape character, recreational and biodiversity value by considering the benefits these assets bring when selecting areas for growth, by optimising densities, by improving connectivity between environmental assets and securing a net gain for biodiversity.

Optimising densities and improving connectivity may have the opposite effect to protecting and enhancing the distinctive landscape character and biodiversity. "Considering the benefits these assets bring" does not give any protection and this objective therefore doesn't make sense.

If you are simply paying lip-service to these assets but prioritising growth at the cost of these assets then this is not a plan for Oxfordshire that we are prepared to support.

Draft Objective 3

To improve health and wellbeing by enabling independence, encouraging healthy lifestyles, facilitating social interaction and creating inclusive and safe communities

This objective refers to healthy placemaking but requires the infrastructure in place to support it. We refer to the statement in the Joint Declaration

"We recognise the need to plan for and deliver substantial additional infrastructure ahead of the arrival of new communities, including necessary transport infrastructure, utilities, digital connectivity, health and education."

and believe that this should be an objective in the 2050 plan.

Draft Objective 4

To create sustainable communities by providing good access to employment, housing, open space, transport, education, services and facilities to meet identified needs and that respond to the challenges of climate change

"Good access" is not quantified and should be to enable the objective to be measurable. This objective cannot be achieved without strong Government support for the necessary infrastructure. This is evidenced in our area at the moment where expansion of the health facilities is delayed, school places are limited, roads are above capacity and improved leisure facilities are unlikely to materialise. The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy highlighted the need for almost £9 billion investment in infrastructure by 2040. Without some recognition of this and the additional investment required before 2050 this objective is worthy of Alice in Wonderland.

What is meant by "identified needs"?

Wantage and Grove Campaign Group - Response

Draft Objective 5
To establish the right conditions to sustain and strengthen the role of Oxfordshire in the UK economy by building on our key strengths and assets
We assume that the "right conditions" are likely to be based on the Local Industrial Strategy as produced by the LEP, which is not an elected body and so is not accountable. As far as we know, the Local Industrial Strategy is not subject to public consultation.
We recognise that national policy states that plans need to "set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth," but to "sustain and strengthen the role of Oxfordshire" may not be the same as sustainable economic growth. Perhaps this objective should be reworded to clarify the meaning.

Draft Objective 6
To create a prosperous, successful and enterprising economy with benefits felt by all
– how can the benefits be felt by all? Perhaps this objective should be reworded or expanded to clarify the meaning and ensure that it is measurable.

Draft Objective 7
To meet the county's identified housing needs, particularly affordable housing and support our selected economic aspirations
Surely this should mean our objectively assessed housing needs not "identified" housing needs?
It is very clear that building more homes does not reduce house prices and that another means must be found to enable the homes to be provided to meet the needs of key workers. We look forward to seeing innovative ideas for how this can be achieved.
What are our "selected economic aspirations"? Any plan which stretches out for 30 years must include phased linkages between economic growth and housing need – if the measurable rate of economic growth slows then the housing need should also be reduced by the same rate.

Draft Objective 8
To ensure that a range of housing options are available that will cater for a variety of needs and are built for adaptability, energy efficiency and to a high quality
We believe that this objective should be strengthened to highlight the need to housing that meets local needs, and not commuter requirements, so that we have housing the meets current government guidelines for 'first time buyers' in Oxfordshire and that is £20,000 deposit and 5.6 times average salaries. This would help with the proven shortage of teachers, nurses and other key workers. Furthermore new homes in the Vale of the White Horse *"built for energy efficiency and to a high quality"* has not been achieved in recent years. New housing developments in Oxfordshire in our area are not high quality design or quality build and do not include energy efficient features and a very small proportion are built for adaptability. We fail to see how this objective can be achieved by any planning authority given current regulations. Without detailed plans for its achievement across the county we believe that this objective should be reworded to be more

realistic.

Draft Objective 9
To reduce the need to travel and provide better travel choices, ensuring that walking and cycling are convenient and attractive, and that public transport is preferred by residents to private car ownership and use
Current developments are built where land is available not where it provides the means to achieve this objective. The Vale of the White Horse Local Plan to 2031 proposes at least 6,000 homes for Wantage and Grove with very little additional employment within a radius of 8-10 miles, no improvements to roads, limited improvements to bus services, and limited (if any) improvements to cycleways. When this plan was first proposed we pointed out that to get 6,000 workers to areas of employment would require 1000 buses on roads which are already at or near capacity; we believe that our point is even more valid today. Re-opening Grove Station would not enable employees to get to Harwell or Culham but might allow workers to get to Oxford or London.

Draft Objective 10
To promote development in the most sustainable locations and co-locating homes and jobs; then connecting those less sustainable locations through improved public transport and digital networks
Ensuring that the Spatial Strategy defines sustainable locations in relation to employment and travel opportunities rather than availability is key to the success of this plan. It is difficult to predict what new technology we will have in 31 years' time in 2050, therefore equally difficult to predict where the most sustainable locations will be.

3.5. **Discussion 4: Do you agree with the commentary relating to the spatial scenarios illustrated, or do you think there are important considerations we have missed? Do you consider there are any other potential spatial scenarios we should consider? Are there any spatial scenarios you think we should avoid (please provide reasons if you can)?**
Oxfordshire is a very diverse County with large swathes of AONB and Green Belt land and much of its desirability comes from its historic towns and villages and the green spaces in between.
Spatial plans should be tailored for each part of the county and be sensitive to local circumstances. This plan is primarily about economic growth and ensuring that the associated housing needs can be met so the spatial strategy should be based around areas of employment or transport hubs, with lower densities in those historic towns and villages which provide the countryside for which our County is known.