

Oxford Futures

A call to action on
the development of
Central Oxfordshire



Developing the knowledge economy in Central Oxfordshire offers a great prize. Prosperity, good jobs, new housing and transport links could be ours. But it also poses great challenges, including the protection and enhancement of our heritage assets. But these challenges can be overcome. We can learn from others.

Four Oxford Futures debates were held in 2013 with support from a number of highly respected organisations. At the debates we heard how smarter growth in our region can be achieved. In this document we set out eight proposals for action by those who hold Central Oxfordshire's future in their hands. Please read the report *Oxford Futures: Achieving smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire* for the thinking behind these recommendations.

Our proposals

1 Set up an Oxford Futures Commission

The interest generated through the debates needs to be sustained. Fresh ideas need to be worked up with the support of the main stakeholders. A good way forward would be for representatives of the main local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership, major employers and landowners, such as Oxford University, to consider the report and the steps to be taken to implement the proposals.

2 Develop a spatial growth plan

We need a spatial growth plan to propose the scale, broad distribution and character of growth. We recommend spending time to assess what different groups would like to see or avoid, to maximise consensus. To gain credibility, coordination needs to be provided by an outside body. The Royal Society of Arts may be willing to take on the role.

3 Establish a Quality Review Panel

There is a high level of expertise around Oxford, including many members of the Academy of Urbanism. This presents a great opportunity to provide the Councils with an independent means of assessing important proposals and avoiding 'eyesores'.

4 Engage the public through a Development Forum

The region needs to find ways of involving people who do not attend workshops and conferences. They will form and fund the communities of the future. A first step is to ask local people what kind of place they want to see in 2050. Such ideas would be fed into a Development Forum. The Forum would comprise those building the communities of the future, including housing associations, and the professionals who will be advising them. Such a Forum would provide a practical way of spreading information on what needs to be built. It might be spear-headed by one of the developers who are already active. This would help ensure that the difficult political decisions about what should happen and where are not ducked.



Traffic congestion is a daily occurrence as people struggle to get to a place of work that is often miles from where they live. This is an unsustainable way of life. It calls for coordinated planning of where we live and work and how we travel

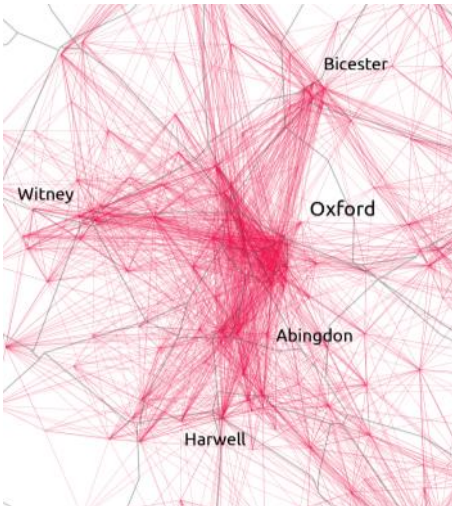
Photo courtesy of David Fleming and Oxford Mail



High quality new housing at Faringdon



This Oxford group visited new Dutch settlements to learn how others are tackling the challenges of growth



Travel to work patterns show a major corridor of movement along the knowledge spine. Public transport does not serve this corridor well

Image courtesy of Tekja Ltd 2013



Freiburg in Germany has won international recognition as one of the best cities in which to live. A historic university city, it has grown along extensions to its tram network. Over 80 per cent of residents live within 250 metres of a tram stop and, as a result, few people own a car. All new housing is built to 'passivhaus' standards, consuming no more energy than it generates

5 Train and develop key decision makers

The value of seeing what others have done is indisputable. The 'looking and learning' process works best when people from different backgrounds are brought together in a constructive way. Oxford Brookes University could set up such a process under its Continuing Education Programme. Design Council CABA could help. The Academy of Urbanism, the Prince's Foundation and similar organisations, who have worked with the City Council, could also contribute.

6 Establish competitions for key sites

Some of the most important sites, such as around Oxford station, or on the edge of the city, involve different landowners and even different authorities. They inevitably arouse controversy. Competitions for developing such sites can attract the best design practices. By getting the best practices engaged, Central Oxfordshire could match international standards. The first step is to discuss the brief and who might be invited to compete, with the Quality Review Panel.

7 Model the impact of transport options

The costs and benefits of different transport improvements and their impacts on different parts of the county are difficult to measure. The Transport Studies Unit in Oxford University is well placed to apply the latest techniques. The work would be part of the process of agreeing how much development should go where.

8 Mobilise and coordinate investment

Further work is needed on the best way to mobilise and coordinate investment on larger schemes. There are a number of possible models. These include the Barton Oxford LLP that Oxford City Council has set up with Grosvenor Estates to develop the new community at Barton Park.

Conclusion

Central Oxfordshire has reached a time when difficult choices have to be made in a much more coordinated way. We must pursue a path of smarter growth. Development and infrastructure must be joined up. Some of the wealth created must be invested in improving opportunities and well-being for all. The knowledge economy allied with our great existing assets can fund it. The genius of its population will enable it.

Our region stands in an exceptional position to use its strengths and opportunities to provide inspiration for how to live well in the 21st century. These recommendations, and the report which backs them up, chart a possible course. We trust these will not only encourage further debate but also concerted action.

This document presents the recommendations made in *Oxford Futures: Achieving smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire*. The report summarises four debates held in 2013 under the banner of 'Oxford Futures', each of which addressed the need for more coordinated planning of the region as a whole.

Oxford Futures is essential reading for local planners, councillors, business leaders, university leaders and others who have a role to play in shaping future development in Central Oxfordshire.

The *Oxford Futures* report was compiled by urban economist Dr Nicholas Falk, working in partnership with Oxford Civic Society. We are grateful to the contributors to the debates and to the following organisations who sponsored the events:

- Academy of Urbanism – www.academyofurbanism.org.uk
- Jon Rowland Urban Design Ltd – www.jrud.co.uk
- Grosvenor Estates – www.grosvenor.com
- Oxford City Council – www.oxford.gov.uk
- Oxford Brookes University – www.brookes.ac.uk
- Royal Society of Arts – www.thersa.org
- Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment – www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk
- URBED – www.urbed.coop

We welcome your views

Comments on the Oxford Futures proposals may be emailed to comment@oxfordfutures.org.uk or can be posted on the Oxford Futures blog at www.oxfordfutures.org.uk

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The full report, *Oxford Futures: Achieving smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire* is available from the above address price £10 incl p & p (discounts available for multiple copies – contact us for details at info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk). Readers are also welcome to download the full report and this summary from our website www.oxfordfutures.org.uk



SHAPING OXFORD'S FUTURE