



The countryside charity  
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

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## **Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy Stage 1 – CPRE Oxfordshire Response, August 2021**

CPRE Oxfordshire supports the need for a holistic assessment of Oxfordshire's infrastructure requirements and it makes sense that this should be aligned with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

### **1. Increased clarity is needed on the inter-relationship between this Strategy and the multitude of other plans currently under consideration.**

Where does this consultation fit with, for example, Oxford City 2040 and other individual District Local Plans, the Oxford Cambridge Arc, the Strategic Vision 2021, and the emerging Local Transport & Connectivity Plan 5? How will this Stage 1 report relate to / influence the Stage 2 report that will run to 2050?

The OxIS material fails to provide a clear picture of these relationships, which would have improved transparency and clarity for respondents. Now that Covid 19 restrictions are beginning to ease perhaps it is time for the Oxfordshire Growth Board to prepare some 'Town Halls' to explain this complex, inter-related series of plans and consultations to the general public?

### **2. CPRE supports the emphasis placed on tackling the Climate and Nature emergencies facing the county but there is a noticeable gap between ambition and solution.**

Section 6 of the summary document clearly flags up a shortage of proposals to address these issues which we do not consider acceptable.

In addition, the appraisal system does not appear to weight projects appropriately in face of these emergencies, but merely to factor them as equal to many other considerations.

An understanding of sorts now exists between all the District Councils, Oxford City Council and the Oxfordshire County Council as to the critical importance of tackling the climate emergency. Given this agreement, many of the statements made within the Summary Report are vague and unambitious eg regarding bus and rapid transport systems.

As well as reviewing the assessment weightings, OxIS should be much more ambitious in terms of setting out specific, measurable standards against which infrastructure will be assessed. For example:

- How far should someone expect to live away from an accessible green space?
- What level of public transport should you be able to expect in different size settlements?



**3. There is a welcome identification of the needs of rural communities as a specific issue.**

CPRE welcomes the move away from a 'spoke and hub' Oxford-centric approach, to a broader 'place-based approach' and recognition being given to the specific needs of rural communities.

For example, the Summary Report states (p17) states 'For most Oxfordshire residents, the car is the first choice; particularly in rural areas.' We would add that rural dwellers should not be unduly penalised for this, unless and until viable public transport alternatives exist.

**4. The focus should shift to bottom up, rather than top down, planning starting with a focus on parish councils and neighbourhood plans.**

The glaring omission of any reference to Town and Parish Councils and to locally prepared Neighbourhood Plans is unacceptable. Looking at the Infrastructure Governance Theme on the website, Town Councils, Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plans are totally absent with pride of place going to the unelected Oxfordshire Growth Board.

There should be a requirement for democratic assessment of projects (public consultation / member scrutiny) before they are added to the list for funding.

**5. The primary purpose of infrastructure investment should be to support existing communities rather than to facilitate excessive growth beyond local need.**

We are concerned that the assessment of projects remains slanted towards facilitating a growth agenda that has never been openly discussed with Oxfordshire residents. For example, OxIS seeks to 'support and champion the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy' which in fact sets aggressive growth targets well beyond local need.

The implication of the table on page 9 of the Summary Report (which identifies '*Needs and schemes directly relevant to towns in Oxfordshire with notable projected future growth to 2040*') is that communities *not* being targeted for future growth will be given no consideration in terms of investment, however much growth they may previously have accommodated or however bad their current infrastructure may be.

**6. OxIS should be clear that where adequate funding is not clearly identified, growth plans must be constrained accordingly.**

OxIS identifies a significant funding gap (£6billion) but fails to elaborate on how the risks around this will be managed and the implications for other plans / growth targets. Such plans must be constrained if adequate funding cannot be identified.



## **7. The current approach to water quality is pitiful and requires significantly more ambition.**

The Technical Summary states (5.2.5) *“As identified in the Thames Water Pollution Incident Reduction Plan (2020), a key need is to reduce sewage outfall incidents in Oxfordshire by 30% by 2025. There is also a need to improve water quality and to reduce water pollution incidents.”*

The lack of identified schemes for improved wastewater handling is regrettable.

All of Oxfordshire’s rivers are subject to intended, planned pollution when it is convenient for Thames Water. This pollution affects biodiversity, residents’ health and wellbeing and the quality of the County’s tourism offer.

There is no information provided on how OxIS has critically assessed proposals from stakeholders such as Thames Water. CPRE would like to ask what due diligence has been done to assess stakeholders' wish lists? As private companies e.g. Thames Water, their interests may not necessarily align with public good.

CPRE questions whether a 30% reduction by 2025 is sufficient and what is to happen beyond that? More detail is needed and more ambition to improve matters. Run off rainwater needs to be collected and stored separately from existing sewage. Wastewater processing needs to be updated and upgraded *before* housing growth is permitted.

ENDS