Draft strategic plan 2025-2028

This document sets out the main elements of the proposed new strategic plan, but it is still work in progress. Further elements will be added, including an introduction and the outcomes framework, before it is finalised for Cabinet in October.

Our vision

Our vision is to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This is centred around strong and connected communities, healthy places to live, and a thriving local economy that benefits everyone.

Greener, fairer and healthier

What do we mean by a greener Oxfordshire?

We want our communities to enjoy clean air, access to green space, and safe and sustainable ways to move around. This means reducing traffic congestion and investing in public transport, cycling and walking; protecting our natural environment; and helping Oxfordshire respond and adapt to a changing climate.

Why is greener important?

A healthy environment serves as the foundation for communities to thrive – it supports health and wellbeing, economic stability and long-term sustainability.

The climate emergency is the biggest challenge the planet faces and so we've set ourselves ambitious targets to address this: we aim to be net zero in our council operations by 2030 and we're committed to enabling a net-zero Oxfordshire well ahead of 2050.

These efforts are making a difference. Since 2008 we've cut our carbon emissions by over a third; we've been named as the top performing county council for recycling for the eleventh year in a row; and we've been rated the best performing county council in the UK for tackling climate change by Climate Emergency UK.

But we need to do more. Transport accounts for 38 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire and is the highest emitting sector; air pollution directly affects people's health, particularly in congested urban areas. Our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan sets out actions to create a net zero transport system, reducing the number of private car journeys and promoting public transport, cycling and walking. These steps will lower emissions and make our communities healthier and safer.

The impact of climate change can also be seen in the frequency of severe flooding and summer heatwaves. During the summer of 2022 there were 65 excess deaths attributed to heat in Oxfordshire. In September 2024 the county experienced widespread flooding as a result of its highest 24-hour rainfall in over 50 years. These events highlight the importance of improving our resilience and response to significant weather events.

What do we mean by a fairer Oxfordshire?

We want all our residents to benefit from the advantages our county has to offer. This means supporting a local economy that benefits everyone; assisting people who face challenges in finding work; making our services as easy to access as possible; and helping communities in need.

Why is fairer important?

Oxfordshire is a wealthy county, but that prosperity is not equally shared. We benefit from one of the strongest local economies in the UK, which generates approximately £23.5 billion of economic output each year from over 430,000 jobs and 32,000 businesses. Yet some of our residents still face real challenges.

Twelve neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire are among the poorest 20 per cent nationally, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. About 20,000 children in Oxfordshire live in poverty, nearly 10 per cent of all children locally. And that rate exceeds 24 per cent in some of our most deprived areas, such as Rose Hill, Blackbird Leys and parts of Banbury.

Housing affordability poses another challenge. Oxfordshire is one of the least affordable areas to live in England. Average house prices are more than ten times the typical local salary, with a knock-on impact on rents. High housing costs increase the risk of homelessness and make daily life harder for many residents, including key workers.

Employment opportunities also vary. The overall unemployment rate in the county is around 3.6 per cent, but it varies by area - ranging from 1-2 per cent in parts of South Oxfordshire to over 5 per cent in some Oxford City wards. Some groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic minorities and care leavers, face additional barriers to employment and services.

Inequality is starkest in health outcomes. On average, a person from a wealthier part of Oxfordshire can expect to live about eight years longer than someone from a poorer area. The gap in years lived in good health is even larger, at twelve to fifteen years. Where you live should not determine your health, but at present it does, and this must change.

To help address these issues, we are working with health partners, businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations and the city and district councils to tackle the root causes of health inequalities, including housing, education and employment. This is our Marmot Place programme of work. We are also ensuring that our services are easier to access and support is available locally through network of family and community hubs. And for those facing hardship, we are providing financial support through our cost of living programme.

What do we mean by a healthier Oxfordshire?

We want all our residents to be happy, healthy and safe. This means helping children get the best start in life; creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential; supporting older people to age well and stay independent for as long as possible; and encouraging everyone to make healthy choices.

Why is healthier important?

Good health is essential for individual and community wellbeing. Oxfordshire has a higher-than-average life expectancy, with men living to about 81 and women to 84. We also have lower rates of smoking and adult obesity than the England average. However, these averages hide significant differences. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed some of these, especially for deprived neighbourhoods and certain ethnic minorities.

Children's health is a particular concern. While most children in Oxfordshire have a good start, this is not universal. By the age of four or five, around 7 per cent of children in the county are obese; by the age of ten or eleven this rises to around 16 per cent. In our most disadvantaged communities, childhood obesity can reach 28 per cent.

We are responding with our YouMove programme, which helps children from lower-income families be more active, and by strengthening school health and nutrition initiatives. Support for early years development is also being increased, especially for children who qualify for free school meals, as evidence shows early intervention brings lifelong gains.

Oxfordshire has an ageing population. About 18 per cent of our residents are over the age of 65 and this is set to rise to over 21 per cent by 2031. The number of residents aged 85+ is rising fastest of all. Through proactive and preventative community outreach, we can help people live well and keep their independence for as long as possible. This is our Oxfordshire Way approach, in which we are helping support people close to home without the need for more formal care.

A healthier Oxfordshire is directly related to our other goals. By becoming a greener county, we will have cleaner air and more opportunities for physical activity, which reduces illness and improves wellbeing; while a fairer county will result in lower levels of poverty and higher rates of employment, improving people's physical and mental health.

Delivering our vision

Greener Oxfordshire: our headline projects

1. We will create better spaces for residents and visitors in our town centres, including Banbury and Witney by December 2026, and Wantage by 2027. The aim is to prioritise pedestrians, improve air quality and support economic growth.

2. Together with transport partners, we will work towards a countywide integrated rail and bus offer, including better connectivity and combined timetables and ticketing. To support this we will produce a new rail plan by November 2025 and develop business cases for new stations and services, including Begbroke and Wantage & Grove by 2027.

3. We will create two dedicated response teams by November 2025 to assess highways enquiries and fix issues in towns and villages with a high number of outstanding issues, working closely with town and parish councils.

Greener Oxfordshire: our wider objectives

- We will continue to implement our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, which sets out actions to create a net zero transport system, reduce the number of private car journeys and promote public transport, cycling and walking.

- We will make journeys by rail, bus and bike easier and more seamless by creating a network of mobility hubs across Oxfordshire.

- We will develop a network of quiet lanes/greenways in rural areas to prioritise walking, cycling and horse riding to increase and improve safe and attractive routes.

- We will help prevent flooding, and strengthen our response to flooding, by carrying out annual gully cleaning and recruiting additional flood wardens to support local communities.

- We will continue our programme of decarbonising our own buildings and fleet of council vehicles, and we will deliver our wider climate action and energy efficiency programmes with businesses, partners and communities.

- We will accelerate our work to conserve and enhance biodiversity and support nature recovery in the county, working with partners to deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.

Fairer Oxfordshire: our headline projects

1. We will roll out a network of family and community hubs across the county during 2026 and 2027 in areas of need. Our family hubs will provide families with access to early help and supported, including services from health, education and community sector partners. These will be supplemented with a digital family hub in 2027. Our community hubs will provide residents with access to services in their local area, with 8 libraries developing community hub facilities by 2027.

2. Through supported employment initiatives such as Connect to Work, we will address health-related barriers to work and support individuals facing significant barriers to employment to get into and stay in work. We aim to support 900 participants on the Connect to Work programme by August 2027, and 2,000 over the five-year programme.

3. We will support young people leaving care into secure employment, creating 30 supported work placements within the council by March 2027.

Fairer Oxfordshire: our wider objectives

- Working with local partners, we will deliver a shared approach to tackling the root causes of health inequalities, including housing, education and employment (the Marmot Place programme).

- Working with partners, we will identify and address the barriers people face in securing work and create practical plans to help more people find sustainable jobs.

- We will implement our *Including Everyone* framework (2025-29), building an inclusive workplace culture, delivering inclusive services, and tackling disadvantage in our communities.

- We will work with schools and other educational settings to deliver the outcomes of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024) and the upcoming SEND White Paper to ensure inclusivity and support all children to thrive.

- We will deliver our SEND transformation programme, working with partners to meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

- Through our Future Generations programme, we will increase opportunities for children and young people to help shape council policy and ensure that council decision-making considers the impact on future generations.

Healthier Oxfordshire: our headline projects

- We will support children who qualify for free school meals to get the best start in life. We aim to increase the number of children who reach a good level of development at age five from 42% to 45% by November 2027.

- We will deliver more specialist school places for children with SEND, including 120 places in Faringdon by January 2027 and 120 places in Oxford by September 2027.

- Working with the voluntary and community service and local authority partners, we will support an expanded and coordinated programme of youth provision by 2026/27 to support teenagers' wellbeing. This includes the launch of our integrated adolescence and prevention service in September 2025, which will support young people at different stages of their adolescent years.

Healthier Oxfordshire: our wider objectives

- We will continue to deliver the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including promoting better mental wellbeing across all ages and renewing our Tobacco Control Strategy 2026-30.

- Using our Oxfordshire Way approach, we will continue to help people live independently within their communities, remaining fit and healthy for as long as possible.

- We will continue to reduce waiting times for care and financial assessments, prioritising people who are at risk of harm and abuse.

- We will continue to work with unpaid carers to improve their wellbeing.

- We will secure Fostering Friendly status, becoming a Fostering Friendly Place and supporting local families to provide loving homes for local children.

- Working with those communities most at risk of poor health, we will gather insight to understand the causes of poor health and develop action plans to improve residents' health.