INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Introduction

1. This strategy sets out a new investment framework, under which the Council can undertake investments against the following broad categories:

    - investments in property funds, bond funds, equities and multi asset classes;
    - maximising the use of and value of our own assets (land & buildings);
    - acquisitions & investments, which derive a service outcome or Council priority, and which generate a commercial return;
    - investments for policy, social, community benefits.

2. Continuing reductions in Central Government funding, at a time when Councils are facing increasing demand for services and an aging population, means that alternative sources of income and optimisation of council assets and resources need to be identified. The investment strategy is intended to enhance the financial resilience of the Council by investing to:

    - secure new sources of income,
    - increase income from existing assets, and/or
    - increase capital growth.

3. The development of an investment portfolio is considered appropriate so long as authorities have a clear and transparent strategy with suitable governance arrangements in place, having access to the necessary skills to understand and manage the commercial risk involved, and establish affordability over the long term.

4. The Council has a key leadership role to play in placemaking in Oxfordshire. The investment decisions that it makes have the potential to greatly enhance the well-being and prosperity of communities across the county. The Council will consider the community value and social value of investment opportunities when making its decisions. Similarly, investments can also support the development of new delivery models for the benefit of residents, businesses, and visitors. The Council will also prioritise opportunities that are carbon neutral, use/generate green energy, or reduce travel and waste. This is all part of our contribution to healthy place shaping and climate change.

5. The Council has existing property and land portfolios which, for a number of reasons, may be surplus to requirements. There is therefore an opportunity to review these assets and resources, and then evaluate the most suitable options in order to optimise operational efficiency, customer access, and economic and financial value.

6. Furthermore, there are opportunities to support regeneration or growth using Council assets to lever in further investment or combine with other private or public sector assets to achieve specific regeneration and growth objectives.

7. An investment strategy also offers opportunities for generating income from assets and the opportunity to deliver a long term and sustainable income. This may be achieved through the capital programme or various investment vehicles which offer a range of diverse options to generate income, particularly where there can be a margin between the net return and the funding costs. Each investment opportunity will be evaluated against stringent financial criteria to ensure each delivers gross income aspirations whilst taking consideration of the costs of operating, including lending, acquisition and operating costs where relevant.

Statutory Framework

8. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has policy responsibility for the Prudential System. This covers the responsibility for ensuring that the statutory guidance drives local authorities to make borrowing and investment decisions in a way that is commensurate with their statutory responsibilities and the best value duty. It also includes overall responsibility for the Local Government finance system, including understanding the risks to the system from changes in the types of borrowing and investment activities that local authorities are undertaking.

9. The Prudential Code requires that where authorities have commercial investments, that local authorities should disclose the contribution they make towards the service delivery objectives and/or place making role of the authority. In addition, the types of investment, due diligence processes, the proportionality of those investments and the local authority's risk appetite are also required to be set out. The Government also recognises that local authorities have a key role in local economic regeneration, and this may mean that they choose to take on projects that the private sector would not consider.

Investment Objectives

10. The Council's investment objectives are defined as follows:

    - To support growth, regeneration, and help deliver the Council's strategic objectives;
    - To reinvest income in line with agreed targets to ensure growth of the portfolio and maximise long term returns/income;
    - To ensure the portfolio is governed and administered in a way that supports long term sustainability for the Council and residents of Oxfordshire.
    - To reinvest equivalent funding whenever we release key property & investment assets to ensure the portfolio size is maintained and increased over time.[1]

[1] Contributions of £40m from land development and disposal are already formally committed to the Capital Programme

Investment Categories

11. Investments have been grouped into four broad categories as set out below

A	B	C	D
Investments in property funds, bond funds, equities and multi asset classes (either through treasury management activities or capital)	Maximise use of and value of our own assets (land & buildings) linked to the Council's forthcoming Property Strategy	Investments, which derive a service outcome or Council priority, and which generate a commercial return	Investments for policy, social, community benefits (which may be at a cost)

Category A

12. The Council already has a portfolio of investments as part of its Treasury Management activities. The strategic approach to these investments is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy. It is proposed that any change to investments that are classified under Category A are managed using the current Treasury Management governance framework. However, it is important to consider the portfolio of investments as a whole, especially as some investments in this category may be classified as capital expenditure rather than treasury management activity.

Category B

13. The Council already owns a sizeable property portfolio (buildings and land) comprising of operational and non-operational assets. Assets which are determined as surplus to operational requirements, via the upcoming Property Strategy, will be considered for investment purposes.[2] The resource to undertake effective management of our property assets already exists in-house, and investment in our own assets can be seen as a continuation and extension of work already underway. However, should the scale and nature of the work change significantly then it may be necessary to review the way in which this work is managed and delivered to ensure the organisation has the correct capacity and skills.

14. Non-operational Sites - as part of OCC's decision to release its small-holdings estates in the 1990s, the organisation purposely held onto sites that were recognised to hold long term potential for residential development. Since this time staff have worked to promote development of these sites through the local plan process seeking approval for collaboration agreements and disposals via Cabinet. There are currently a number of major development sites totalling 86 hectares, that are in progress, with anticipated receipts expected from 2024. £40m of the anticipated receipts are already included with

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[2] Please note that on occasions assets may be released in part, with the remaining space retained for operational purposes.

the capital programme funding up to 2028/29.[3] The table below shows the extent of our remaining non-operational land holdings that have development value.

Phases	Land Holdings	Indicative Timescales
In Progress	~86 hectares	Major Receipts 2024 onwards
Medium Term	~17 hectares	Receipts c.2035-40 onwards
Long Term	~29 hectares	Receipts c.2040-50 onwards

15. Operational Sites - closely linked to Transformation and the Property Strategy, the Council has the potential to make further changes to how staff work in and use buildings in order to rationalise space and better match customer requirements. Using operational space more efficiently has the ability to both reduce running costs and generate income from the commercial market. Over the last decade there has been significant work to improve the utilisation of sites leading to a 25% reduction in running costs. A number of key Council-owned sites in central Oxford were reviewed in 2018 with input from external property consultants, validating the case for releasing and redeveloping specific sites in order to generate income.[4] With access to funding, under the investment strategy, there is potential across the estate to further optimise the use of our assets and invest in them to maximise capital values and/or rental yields.

Category C

16. This type of investment reflects the acquisition of assets, that we would then manage and/or develop for others to lease. Such investments would be undertaken for the primary purpose of achieving policy benefits or service outcomes (whether this is supporting economic growth, delivery of services, as well as making a financial return and therefore support our other Council objectives).

17. In relation to land acquisitions, where the intention of the purchase is to increase land value rather than contribute towards service delivery objectives, is considered to be a low risk commercial activity. Likewise, transfers of existing land holdings with an expected future increase in value, is also considered to be a low risk commercial activity.

Category D

18. These investments aim to deliver a wider social, service, or community benefit, and may come at a cost. They may include:

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[3] The majority of these receipts will not be realised until at least 2024 onwards.
[4] Or in some case, increase a capital receipt which could then be reinvested.

- Delivery of projects that otherwise might stall or not progress if left in private sector hands but will fulfil Council objectives;
- Momentum where intervention by a Council can then unlock or lead to confidence in the market from third parties;
- Non-financial gains where inward investment can create/maintain jobs/ training;
- Purchase of underperforming property assets which provide key strategic regeneration opportunities to generate the catalyst for economic development;
- Partnering with others to deliver broader benefits and unlock financial investments for the area that would otherwise be lost.

Reporting and Management of Investment Portfolio

19. All investment activity will be grouped and reported as a single portfolio and reflected in the Council's Capital & Investment Strategy, which requires agreement via the annual budget setting process. As part of this, a new portfolio will be created in the Capital Programme to cover dedicated funding for investments. Investments and returns will be monitored and appropriately balanced across the 4 investment categories. Decisions over the use and reinvestment of proceeds of the portfolio will be taken with a due regard for the long-term growth of the portfolio.

Governance

20. It is proposed that investments in Category C will follow the governance route set out below. Investments in Categories A, B, & D will follow existing governance routes in line with the Council's Constitution and Financial Procedure Rules (FPRs). Categories B & D will require submission of a Capital Business Case or equivalent. However, all categories will be reported annually as part of the Council's Capital & Investment Strategy as part of the governance of the Council's budget setting process.

21. The property investment market is very competitive and needs consistent and quick decisions if the Council is going to be successful in managing assets in this environment. It is therefore proposed that an Investment Advisory Panel is established to act as an advisory body for these initial decisions. They should ensure the decisions fall within the Corporate Strategy and are based upon the approved investment matrix (See Appendix A). They will then report their recommendations to Cabinet or Full Council in line with current governance, along with appropriate due diligence to support decision-making.

22. The Investment Advisory Panel will be made up of:

Members

- Leader of the Council
- Deputy Leader of the Council

- Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance
- Cabinet Member with responsibility for Property
- Leader of the Opposition
- Performance Scrutiny Chair
- Leader of the secondary Opposition Group[5]

Officers

- Chief Executive
- Senior Officer with responsibility for Finance (Section 151 Officer)
- Senior Officer with responsibility for Investment
- Senior Officer with responsibility for Property
- Monitoring Officer

23. The primary purposes of the Investment Advisory Panel would be two-fold:

    - To consider recommendations from officers regarding the potential purchase of a property asset, prior to submission of a bid. This would include consideration of the yield, and the Investment Evaluation based on the criteria set out. The ultimate consideration would be whether to submit a bid or not, and at what value.

    - To consider the results of the due diligence process, (following acceptance of an offer from Council to purchase an asset), with the ultimate consideration of whether to endorse the purchase and proceed to exchange of contracts.

24. Due to the pace at which this sector operates, where there is no alternative, decisions to submit bids, approve purchases and exchange of contracts would be taken as urgent decisions by the Leader and S151 Officer in consultation with the Investment Advisory Panel and reported to the next available meeting of Cabinet and any other existing governance routes as appropriate. Where a decision is not time-bound they will go via current governance arrangements and be approved by Cabinet or Full Council as required. It should be noted that a number of investment decisions are likely to be time critical, and whilst not requiring the ‘urgent decision’ process, may require entry onto the Cabinet forward plan at short notice or potentially an extraordinary Cabinet meeting.

25. Given the need to react quickly and take timely decisions, meetings of the Investment Advisory Panel may need to be convened on a ‘virtual’ basis. In order to ensure the necessary governance, the meeting should include:

    Members - at least two of:

    - Leader of the Council;
    - Deputy Leader of the Council

[5] N.B. The Leader of the second largest Opposition Group will <u>only</u> attend, when the roles of Leader of the Opposition and the Chair of Performance Scrutiny are held by the same person.

- Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance;
- Cabinet Member with responsibility for Property.

Officers - must include:

- Senior Officer with responsibility for Finance (Section 151 Officer), or S151 Deputy;

And at least one of:

- Chief Executive;
- Senior Officer with responsibility for Investment;
- Senior Officer with responsibility for Property;
- Monitoring Officer.

26. No substitutes may vote at the Panel or contribute to the voting quorum. However, the Section 151 Officer may send their S151 Deputy. Meetings must be held in person or as a conference call/video call. Prior to the meeting taking place the following completed documentation should be circulated (in confidence) to all members of the panel at least 3 working days before the meeting. If any member is unable to attend they can submit questions to be considered by the panel at their meeting.

    - For potential purchase: completed proforma (see Appendix B) detailing the background information and overview of the asset, completed initial scoring matrix (see Appendix A) and reasons for the scores and any other initial external views of the asset that may be relevant at that time;

    - For properties being considered for endorsement of purchase: completed due diligence as agreed at previous investment panel.

27. A proposition will not be considered if it does not meet the investment criteria i.e. it falls below the minimum score of 50% on the scoring matrix. Where a Category C investment relates to land acquisition and cannot properly be assessed via the current scoring matrix it will be assess via a scoring matrix for land acquisitions, which will be developed in due course. Following the meeting a note of the recommendations made and the reasons for these to be completed will be recorded and circulated to all members of the group, whether in attendance or not. Appended is an Investment Matrix and Proforma, which helps in assessing the link to corporate objectives, suitability and return from any investments, and the risk profile that the Council is prepared to accept in considering any potential investments.

Implementation Plan

28. Although investment strategy will enable the Council to respond to opportunities as they arise, there is also a need to develop a programme of planned investment projects linked particularly to Type B investments. Following adoption of this strategy there will likely be a need to resource and forward fund elements of this work. There are also key interdependencies with Transformation and the Strategic Asset Management Plan that

will need to be worked through in order to align activities that impact staff and operational sites.