

# Oxfordshire County Council

## Household Waste Recycling Centre

### Strategy

### 2023-2043

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#### Background

1. Oxfordshire County Council has a legal duty to provide Household Waste Recycling Centres ([HWRCs](#)) where residents can deposit household waste free of charge. Oxfordshire currently has seven HWRCs, and the sites receive around one million visits each year and accept approximately 40,000-45,000 tonnes of residual and recyclable material each year with a recycling rate of around 65.5%. The facilities are highly regarded in the county and receive high satisfaction ratings when residents when asked about HWRC layout, cleanliness and staff helpfulness.
2. This strategy replaces the 2015 HWRC strategy<sup>1</sup> which aimed to close sites and deliver 3 or 4 super sites. This has proved to be undeliverable due to a number of factors, including the unavailability of large pieces of land for new sites and ongoing resident feedback about the importance of local facilities. It is intended to provide an overarching direction to follow and set out the framework that subsequent decisions can be aligned with, and not intended to set out the detail of individual activities. It will be reviewed every 5 years to ensure it is still fit for purpose and will be accompanied by an implementation plan.

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<sup>1</sup> [2015 HWRC strategy](#)

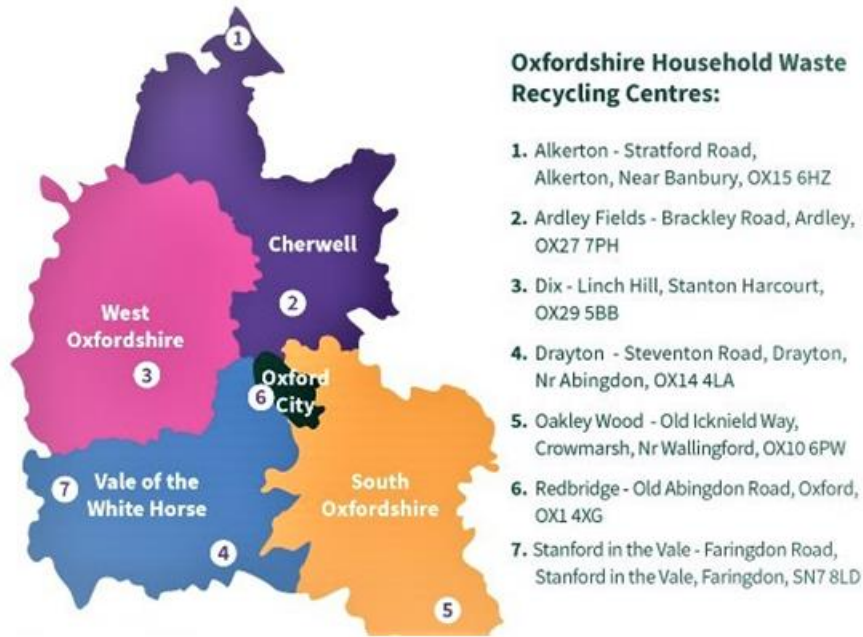


Figure 1: Map of Oxfordshire's HWRC network

3. All authorities in Oxfordshire work together as part of the Oxfordshire Resources and Waste Partnership (ORWP) to coordinate and improve waste services to households across the county and have agreed a bold and ambitious joint waste strategy<sup>2</sup> that has waste reduction, the circular economy, increasing recycling, and reducing waste to landfill as its three key aims. We want to continue to be amongst the best at waste reduction and recycling in the country, lowering carbon and driving a circular economy. Our HWRCs play an integral and essential role in those aims and aspirations taking around a sixth of all the household waste generated in the county. Their performance is already good, but we know we can achieve more and our commitments within the joint strategy commit us to achieving that.
4. Our HWRCs are also an important part of the household waste service offered to residents and complement kerbside waste services offered by the district and city councils by providing an easy and accessible route for residents to dispose of larger or more unusual household items 362 days per year. They are also used by our district and city partners and other waste management services as drop off locations for certain items, reducing transport distances and enabling the efficient management and recycling of a large number of items.
5. While as a group of authorities we manage the waste created by householders, an important part of our service is to help them avoid generating waste in the first place and driving behavioural change by providing the motivation and facilities to aid them transition to the circular economy. We can do this by encouraging and facilitating them to move away from the current take - make – use - dispose cycle into one where goods are kept in circulation for as long as possible, making the most of the resources already in use, saving carbon, and helping to prevent further damage and restore nutrients and biodiversity. Through our waste wizard

<sup>2</sup> Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2018-2023  
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/waste-and-recycling/OxfordshiresResourcesandWasteStrategy.pdf>

look up tool we allow residents to find local solutions for the materials they no longer want/need, prioritising reuse, repair, and recycling before disposal. Our HWRCs can play an increasingly important role in this, by providing a point for repair and reuse and maximising recycling of more niche materials as well as everyday goods and materials.

6. The HWRC service and this strategy aligns with Oxfordshire County Council's Corporate Strategy<sup>3</sup>, contributing towards our action to address the climate emergency by increasing recycling rates and aiding the transition towards the circular economy, and by tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire by providing a universal service to all residents, and contributing towards the health and wellbeing of residents through sustainable waste management practices. The strategy will also form an important part of future community engagement and democratic decision making around the HWRC service.

## About this Strategy

7. To provide the standard of service required by legislative and societal changes and to tackle climate change, it is necessary for us to address our current network of household waste recycling centres which are outdated, too small, and need significant investment. In addition, we own less than 50% of the sites and leases and planning permissions are short term meaning long term security of these sites need to be addressed.
8. Our vision is to maintain, enhance, improve and expand our HWRC infrastructure and service to meet the future needs of our residents and the waste management services we operate, building on our high recycling rate, reducing our carbon impact and embracing the circular economy through repair, upcycling and reuse over the next 20 years whilst being mindful of Local Government budgetary constraints.
9. This strategy sets out the high-level drivers for change, and our aims and principles to deliver upon that.
10. The HRWC strategy has several key drivers:
  - a. At present we only own 3 of the 7 sites we operate. Planning and lease expiry on sites are a high risk to service delivery. New sites are expensive and take a long time to develop. Any new sites required would seek to be closer to population centres and look towards the principles of a circular economy and minimise carbon as part of our approach towards tackling the climate emergency.
  - b. Current sites were developed around a landfill service and sites. They do not meet modern standards and are too small to meet the demands of a modern HWRC service. They have lacked investment and, in some cases, need significant repair and maintenance programmes as well as improvements to meet new and emerging legislative and legal standards, for which costs will be unavoidable.
  - c. The population in Oxfordshire is growing and this will mean more waste and more people using our HWRC service. Several of our current sites are already over capacity (meaning residents need to queue to deposit materials) at peak times, and other sites are nearing capacity at off peak times. Congestion on site can reduce recycling as residents who have

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<sup>3</sup> [Strategic Plan 2022-2025 \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/strategic-plan-2022-2025)

- already queued to enter are less willing to take the time necessary to sort materials into the correct bin. Reduced recycling leads to higher costs and an adverse impact on the environment. As all sites are currently reaching or over capacity, population growth linked to new housing developments will increase the pressure on the sites. A HWRC strategy will aid us seek the investment we require and to plan for this growth and ensure that the right sized sites are located in the right place to meet the need of our residents and our environment.
- d. The role and nature of waste services provided by the council will change over the next few years as forthcoming national legislative and policy changes are introduced. An agile, flexible, and responsive HWRC strategy will enable us to ensure our network is flexible and able to adapt to these changes as well as the growing pressures of population growth within Oxfordshire.
  - e. A key part of delivering the circular economy is increasing the amount of material repaired and reused, we need to ensure that the HWRC infrastructure plays an active part in delivering this. Investing and delivering on our HWRC strategy will enable us to ensure our facilities allow residents to easily donate materials for re-use / re-sale and enable easy and safe recycling and disposal of materials.
  - f. It helps in our action against climate change and is a key component in driving a circular economy by ensuring our network of HWRC's maximise reusing and recycling more items and reducing the need for carbon intensive new materials to be manufactured. Sites already have a recycling rate of over 60%, meaning less materials are sent to landfill or for disposal. The strategy through the HWRCs is also part of the green economy, providing green jobs to those working on site, and those involved in onward management of materials. All of these points and drivers help us plan for and maximise our Climate Action Framework.
  - g. The management of our HWRCs is currently a contracted-out service. An up to date HWRC strategy, along with our overarching countywide joint strategy will provide a sound framework to drive future contract specifications and service delivery.
  - h. To provide a framework which enables us to seek funding from a variety of sources, including from developers where new housing is planned.
11. To inform and guide the development of this strategy, in summer 2021 OCC carried out a public engagement exercise<sup>4</sup> to determine what residents valued about the HWRC service which received 1900 responses. Key messages from this survey showed that residents did not want to travel far and wanted easy to use convenient sites that had reuse areas and accepted a wide range of materials.
  12. A further consultation in Spring 2023<sup>5</sup> showed respondents agreed with the aims detailed in this strategy and the proposals to achieve them. Comments and suggestions have been incorporated where appropriate.

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<sup>4</sup> [Let's talk waste and recycling | Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Household Waste Recycling Centre Strategy 2023-2043 | Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#)

13. In 2022 we commissioned consultants<sup>6</sup> to investigate circular economy models, and how they could be implemented at HWRCs, along with a carbon study<sup>7</sup> which looked at the differences in carbon emissions associated with depositing materials through kerbside waste services versus taking them to a HWRC. The feedback from this, as well as results from ongoing waste analysis that identified that over half of the contents of disposal bins could have been reused or recycled on site, have also informed this strategy
14. OCC is currently undergoing several budgetary pressures, and we have been mindful of this when preparing this strategy.

### Our primary aims are to:

15. Provide a good quality service for Oxfordshire residents, our waste collection authorities, and other key stakeholders and deliver on our commitments in our joint waste strategy. We will do this by:
  - a. By ensuring we make it easy for and encourage our residents to do the right thing with their household waste and recycling. To do this our HWRC site infrastructure needs to be accessible to everyone, it needs to allow our residents to find and access HWRC sites quickly and easily and the onsite layout needs to be clear and understandable. There needs to be plenty of space to manoeuvre vehicles and unload and deposit materials into the correct containers, or deposit them for reuse.
  - b. HWRCs will support and complement kerbside collection services including provision of suitable space for use by district councils as appropriate. This will enable us to maximise the amount and types of waste they are able to recycle. They will also offer a cost-effective outlet for waste generated through small scale DIY projects by householders and will prevent misuse of the sites.
  - c. Sites will be maintained and will always be safe places to visit and work and be compliant with all relevant legislation.
  - d. Our HWRC service will aim to align and stay aligned with all appropriate County Council policies and procedures, and the action plan will be a key component to deliver this.
16. Develop and promote in-county reuse and repair of household materials taken to HWRCs
  - a. To aid the transition to a circular economy, reuse and repair needs to become a more mainstream activity. Providing facilities that drive this by providing convenient facilities to deposit goods for reuse, along with knowing where to find good quality preloved goods will help to reduce the quantity of 'new' items bought. Reducing the number of new things bought helps to reduce the carbon emissions associated with extraction of materials, manufacture and transport.
  - b. While some out of county reuse from HWRCs currently happens, we would like to take the opportunity while improving and extending sites to explore and maximise

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<sup>6</sup> OCC commissioned study: Technical Note: Review of HWRC reuse solutions. WSP 2022 (internal report)

<sup>7</sup> OCC commissioned study: Examining the carbon impacts of HWRCs and kerbside collections. Ricardo 2021 (internal report)

in-county on-site and off-site reuse. Reuse and repair shops on-site or situated in nearby towns mean that an increased number of smaller and lower value goods could be reused as they do not need to be transported excessive distances. Offering good quality, lower cost items will also help our residents on lower incomes, or those looking to save money and resources.

17. Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and energy recovery
  - a. The waste hierarchy details the priority order in which waste should be managed – Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, Recover and Dispose. We want to design and operate HWRCs in a way that helps us reduce the amount of material sent to landfill and for energy recovery. As well as reuse and repair shops this involves increasing the amount we recycle through better segregation of materials on site and increasing the number of materials we accept for recycling. Our residents have stated they would like to see us take steps to limit unsegregated waste being deposited at our sites and we will continue to explore the best routes to deliver that.
  - b. As the impacts of waste become more apparent, and driven by incoming legislation, producers and manufacturers are changing the way that they make and package materials and assisting in their recovery for recycling at the end of their useful life through product return schemes and other mechanisms. OCC supports this change but is aware that this may mean HWRCs evolve to provide a different service. The range of materials we accept may change for example if more material is accepted back for recycling directly by producers and retailers, the material brought to site may be older, more difficult, and expensive to manage and less easily recyclable. Our infrastructure (and budgets) will aim to be flexible to enable us to adapt to this change.
  - c. There may also be the opportunity to act as a collection or return point for retailers to maximise take back schemes. To do this HWRCs will need clean and dry areas to accept and store different material streams.
18. Reduce carbon emissions by seeking to manage waste as close to source as possible
  - a. A recent study<sup>8</sup> showed that less carbon is emitted when disposing of items (that can be recycled in kerbside bins) using the kerbside collection service as opposed to bringing them to a HWRC for recycling. We will continue to promote kerbside services as the primary route of recycling to minimise carbon emissions, however we will ensure that our HWRC infrastructure retains space to accept these materials where possible to maximise the recovery and recycling of them.
  - b. The carbon study also showed that the impact of transporting kerbside recyclables to a HWRC was small compared to the impact of onward transport of materials to further reprocessing. We live in a global economy, and goods bought and used in the UK are manufactured all over the world. Recyclable materials are traded as a commodity and, in some cases, shipped thousands of miles to be reprocessed. The carbon impact of the transport can be large, and in some countries there are concerns that the recycling is not processed with the same environmental safeguards as in the UK. We

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<sup>8</sup> OCC commissioned study: Examining the carbon impacts of HWRCs and kerbside collections. Ricardo 2021

will aim to use UK based re-processors wherever possible to help to reduce the carbon impact.

- c. To support this, consideration will be given to the provision or use of other supporting infrastructure such as transfer stations or depots for the bulking of goods where materials can be brought from all HWRCs and stored and bulked up for onward transport. It may be appropriate for this to be located on a HWRC, or a separate site.

### To achieve these aims we will:

19. Secure, maintain, and, where feasible, enhance, our current HWRC network
  - a. We want to make the most of existing assets and our priority is to secure the current HWRC network so that we retain a minimum of 7 sites for residents. However, over the next few years, several sites are reaching the end of their planning permission or lease arrangements.
  - b. Where it is not possible to stay at an existing site, we will look to move to a new location to serve residents in that area, seeking to expand the site footprint to account for population growth and the space needed to deliver our aims above.
  - c. Where we are staying at sites we will seek to expand and/or reorganise the layout where possible, prioritising additional capacity to accommodate the growing population, for reuse and repair, and to enable us to collect and segregate more materials for recycling and where practical the wider waste management needs for the county.
  - d. We will consider adding additional or replacement sites to further future proof HWRC capacity. The location of these will be determined by population growth, land availability and access to other Oxfordshire HWRCs, and will seek to be as close as possible to centres of population.
  - e. We will seek to ensure all of Oxfordshire's HWRCs have the capacity to serve the residents of Oxfordshire, are fit for the future and meet local and national needs and priorities.
  - f. Site replacement, expansion, reorganisation, and additional sites will all be subject to available funding. Funding will be sought from a variety of sources, including S106 developer funding agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy.
  - g. We will continually look for new ways to innovate and deliver flexible, cost effective, customer focussed HWRC services. We will regularly review and benchmark against best practice elsewhere to maximise recycling, support the transition to a Circular Economy and lower carbon to tackle the climate emergency. All whilst recognising the ever-increasing financial restraints on local authorities and competition with other critically important council services.

20. We aspire to keep materials undercover by building sheltered bays and drop off donation points. This will reduce contamination and damage from inclement weather, and maximise the reuse and recycling potential of the materials and goods we accept
- a. The weather can have a significant impact on the quality of materials that are sent for recycling. Wet materials are heavy, cost more to transport, and can be more difficult to recycle. An indoor HWRC, or skips being sheltered by a canopy will keep materials drier, maximising their recycling potential. This will also help us to comply with best practice to maintain the quality of recycle.
  - b. Covered drop off areas will also make the sites more user friendly. We notice a significant drop off in visitor numbers during wet, cold, or very hot weather and in winter months when it is dark meaning sites are busier when the weather/natural light levels improve. A covered drop off area may mean site usage will be more even, reducing the chance of queuing, maximising the capacity of the sites, and providing a more pleasant user experience.
  - c. Reuse, repair, upcycling, and other circular economy activities are vitally important to help us increase the lifespan of materials and reduce waste, so we aim to include a covered drop off area for reusable materials at each site. HWRCs will have clean, dry areas to store, sort and potentially repair and sell donated materials. Where shops are on HWRCs we also need to ensure that there is adequate parking away from operational areas for shoppers.
  - d. We will explore social value opportunities, including the involvement of the third sector, in service delivery and on sites where business cases exist, and they meet other contractual commitments. Social value will form a key part of future contracts when current contracts expire.
  - e. Opportunities will be explored to incorporate environmental improvements and maximise energy efficiency when designing sites. Solar, green roofs and green fuelling will all be considered as part of the business case.
21. If replacement or new sites are needed, we will locate these as close as possible to centres of population to limit drive times for residents.
- a. We are aware that most items residents bring to a HWRC are large, heavy, or too numerous to carry safely, and therefore they transport them to site in a car. Residents are already able to bring materials to all sites using a bike and/or bike trailer, taxi or hire car. Pedestrian access and locating HWRCs on public transport routes will be considered when identifying new sites in line with OCCs active travel aspirations, though will always be subject to the ability to provide pedestrian access safely. As car ownership trends evolve, more residents may travel to site using a car club vehicle, lift share, or other form of transport. We will keep these in mind while developing access policy to ensure that residents continue to be able to access sites easily.
  - b. By locating new HWRCs as close as possible to centres of population we hope to keep carbon emissions related to travelling to a HWRC as low as possible. However, we recognise that Oxfordshire is a rural county and a proportion of residents will



need to travel longer distances to a HWRC. We encourage residents to combine trips to the HWRC with other journeys where possible, and any future developments will consider innovative approaches and any relevant best practice guidance available. We will also promote maximising the use of kerbside facilities and those provided by third parties for example supermarkets, and our Waste Wizard tool will be a key component in that aim.

- c. We will continue to work with our district and city colleagues to explore complementary use of HWRCs to provide the best value services to our residents where practical and feasible to do so. This will include looking with other partners and stakeholders to co-locate facilities and maximise efficiencies, or the services we and they are able to offer.
  - d. Where possible we will seek to own freehold land on which sites are situated providing greater certainty over the long-term future of sites and reducing the risks associated with leased in sites in accordance with the Property Strategy. We will also explore owning site assets such as machinery and containers, with the aim of reducing mobilisation time between contractors and keeping site management fees as low as possible.
22. We will aim to schedule improvements to HWRCs sympathetically to reduce the impact on residents
- a. We are aware that the closure of a HWRC for site improvement works will impact residents, either requiring them to drive further to other HWRCs, or to store waste for longer in their homes until the HWRC reopens. We will use our best endeavours to ensure that no two adjacent HWRCs are shut for improvement works at the same time, retaining an accessible service for residents who need immediate access to our service.

## Implementation

23. An implementation and action plan will be developed once the strategy is approved and will be regularly reviewed and will remain an active plan to drive the service.
24. Infrastructure is a core part of this strategy and implementation will take various factors into account including land ownership, lease length, planning permission and population growth, and well as available budget. Broadly the order of works will be:
- a. Continue with essential maintenance works at all sites
  - b. Secure lease and planning permission extensions at relevant sites
    - i. If not possible, begin site replacement process
  - c. Investigate possibility of improvement and capacity expansion at sites to increase the amount reused, repaired, and recycled – beginning with the sites under most capacity pressure
  - d. Consider the location of any additional sites(s)
  - e. Seek to ensure alignment with other core Council strategies and objectives and those of our partners through our joint waste strategy

23. The strategy and implementation and action plan will drive any future procurement of the management service and improvements in service delivery.

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