

## Oxfordshire County Council Property Strategy

This strategy sets out our approach to property assets and will guide our priorities for managing and developing our estate over the next 5 years.

The purpose of this strategy is to facilitate delivery of the council's corporate plan. It is an enabling strategy and sits alongside our workforce, IT and digital strategies to support the delivery of high-quality, accessible and modern public services for the people of Oxfordshire.

Our ambition is: ***To create an efficient, innovative, and accessible property estate that delivers our climate action objectives and explores opportunities for social value. That is supported directly through the delivery of council services or indirectly by generating strong commercial returns. With our customer in front of mind.***

We will develop an agile service delivery model and workforce that has the capacity to meet our needs in a post pandemic environment. Where our services are not bound to buildings and set locations but are accessible remotely and digitally. Where needed we will deliver face to face services in local spaces, places and community venues, in customers' homes and through working in partnership with suppliers, partners and the community and voluntary sector and their bases too. Our property strategy and estate will facilitate this.

We will work hard to minimise journeys, not assuming that customers and colleagues should travel into Oxford City Centre and that the county council should have access and visibility at locations spread across the county.

Our places of work will be welcoming and safe spaces for people to work in agile ways, accessing the right office space and IT equipment to support service delivery at the point it can be most effective. We will also need to create flexible, collaborative spaces for teams, partners, and suppliers to come together for the benefit of our residents.

We understand that some teams will need dedicated spaces to deliver services. Where this is the case, we will seek to develop a range of approaches that enable a combination of buildings based for flexible/agile delivery, supported by technology.

We are an accountable public body and as such our democratic and decision-making processes need to reflect these principles. We will develop an estate that enables a combination of local meetings, virtual public meetings and more traditional council chamber-based meetings with public broadcast to ensure our democracy reflects, enhances and supports our agile delivery model.

There is much uncertainty over the future, but lessons learnt from Covid-19 and its consequential impact upon our needs brings an immediate opportunity to review our estate and accelerate change in how services are delivered the spaces they require.

Our estate is comprised of three categories, and each of these categories has a broad objective:

<b>Investment</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Operational</b>
<p>Assets retained for investment purposes (e.g. farms, land for development)</p> <p>Objective: these assets are managed to protect the long-term interests of Oxfordshire and maximise value</p>	<p>Assets used for non-operational purposes (e.g. pre school, playing fields or parish council).</p> <p>Objective: to support policy objectives such as community use and social value whilst generating the best possible tangible and/or intangible returns</p>	<p>Assets used for service delivery (e.g. libraries, fire stations, offices)</p> <p>Objective: to support modern service delivery cost effectively and safely</p>

Our operational property portfolio can be split into three broad categories which are within the scope of this strategy.

**Service delivery** – buildings/sites which facilitate all our statutory and other front-line services such as community support service centres, children & family centres, libraries, fire stations, depots etc. Some back-office accommodation provision is also included within these buildings/sites too.

**Support services** – buildings which facilitate all our back office/support related services such as HR, ICT, finance, planning etc. The majority of our workforce are currently based in these buildings.

**Partnership working** – we will look to explore opportunities to collocate or share our buildings with key strategic partners for the benefit of our communities and drive through efficiencies and help reduce running costs.

The approach to operational buildings that are deemed surplus to requirements will be dealt with via the Investment Strategy along with all community and investment assets.

## **Our objectives**

The key strategic objectives of this strategy are to -

- **Support excellent service delivery for the community**
  - Provide the right property, in the right place, to meet operational service needs
- **Deliver Climate Action priorities**
  - Ensure our corporate Climate Action objectives which include making our corporate estate carbon neutral by 2030 are met and establishing the Council as an exemplar to other property owners

- **Support and empower a more agile organisation**
  - Reduce reliance on desk dominated offices and invest to develop great workplaces – accessible, modern, innovative shared workspaces based on future working principles and in line with our Digital offering i.e. hot desking, collaborative meeting spaces etc
- **Achieve more value from our assets**
  - Further rationalise our estate to reduce overall cost
  - Prioritise utilisation of freehold assets for front and back office delivery
  - Maximise the value of assets not required for operational purposes to be delivered through effective and creative commercial negotiations and to explore opportunities for social value, to support the council's Investment Strategy
  - Share office space with key strategic partners where it makes sense to do so

## **Our approach**

In delivering these objectives we will apply the following principles in our approach,

1. Embed Climate Action objectives in all decision-making when reshaping the operational estate e.g., minimise travel and avoid use of inefficient buildings
2. Invest to develop great workplaces - modern, innovative and inspiring shared workspaces situated close to transport links to adapt to agile / hybrid working principles and in line with our IT & Digital offering i.e. hot desking, collaborative meeting spaces etc
3. Challenge old ways of working and embrace modern and innovative approaches, including improving customer access and experience.
4. Generate income and ensure the best value for money through the use and development of our estate.
5. Where necessary, where an asset does not contribute to our strategic outcomes, we will maximise our return to dispose and create maximum capital receipt.
6. Work with partners (including through One Public Estate) to maximise shared opportunities including co-location.
7. Encourage/establish a smaller presence in all key localities, instead of a single 'big HQ' approach.
8. Release leasehold property where appropriate so we reduce our rental expenditure.