



# Resident perceptions of Strategic Plan

## Sub-Report

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PREPARED FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY  
COUNCIL

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# Contents

Background	Page 3
Exploring attitudes and priorities of residents	Page 6
Reactions to draft strategic vision	Page 15
Strong and Connected Communities	Page 20
Healthier Oxfordshire	Page 23
Fairer Oxfordshire	Page 27
Greener Oxfordshire	Page 31
Conclusions & Recommendations	Page 35

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# Background



# Background

Following the local elections in May 2025, Oxfordshire County Council is starting to shape its overarching vision and strategic priorities for the period 2025 – 2029. Parallel to this, the council is also developing its preferred proposal for local government reorganisation in the county, which must be submitted to government by late November.

To support this work, Oxfordshire County Council commissioned REMind Research, an independent research agency, to carry out a series of focus groups with Oxfordshire residents.

The primary objectives for the sessions were to:

- explore current behaviours and attitudes towards local government and services among residents from across the county and representing different living situations/ life stages
- identify any gaps in understanding, provision or future requirements
- examine reactions to draft strategic vision, statements and potential actions
- deliberate benefits and concerns regarding future structure

This sub-report provides a comprehensive and impartial account of resident opinions on the aspects of the strategic plan discussed specifically within the sessions. As a qualitative study, some of the opinions and inferences may not be factually correct, however, they are the perceptions of those participating.



# Approach

## METHOD

- 2-hour focus group sessions with Oxfordshire residents
- Conducted online via Zoom
- Independently recruited by Simply Field
- Independently designed, moderated and analysed by REMind Research
- Fieldwork conducted between 1 July and 15 July 2025
- 9 groups completed; 63 participants participated
- Participants welcomed the opportunity to participate and appreciated the opportunity to be part of the study and share their views

## PROFILE

Group composition (9 focus groups overall)	Overall breakdown of participants
1. Younger adults, drawn from urban geographies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 27 x men</li><li>• 36 x women</li><li>• 50 x White</li><li>• 13 x BAME</li><li>• 22 x &lt;30 years old</li><li>• 20 x 30-59 years old</li><li>• 21 x 60+ years old</li></ul>
2. Younger adults, drawn from rural geographies	
3. Younger adults, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	
4. Families, drawn from urban geographies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 21 x children in household</li><li>• 42 x no children in household</li><li>• 9 x Cherwell</li><li>• 27 x Oxford City<sup>1</sup></li><li>• 6 x West Oxfordshire</li><li>• 13 x South Oxfordshire</li><li>• 8 x Vale of White Horse</li></ul>
5. Families, drawn from rural geographies	
6. Families, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	
7. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from urban geographies	
8. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from rural geographies	
9. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	

1. A greater number of Oxford City Council residents were included not because of oversampling, but because three sessions included residents from wards including areas ranked within the 20% most deprived nationally—six out of ten of these wards fall within the Oxford City Council boundary





Exploring attitudes and priorities of residents

# Awareness of local government structure

Residents show interest in being involved and consulted on policies affecting them and the county's future, even if local government structures and council strategies aren't foremost in their thoughts.




### Not top of mind

Residents often think about local services or issues but rarely consider the council's strategic aims or government structure.

*"I knew [different councils] existed but it's probably not something I give that much thought to."*  
Female, Younger, Urban area

*"Surprised there's three [tiers]. I'm even surprised there's more than one, because I never pay attention."*  
Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



### Confusion over services

Many are not aware how responsibility for services within the county are distributed between the different tiers.

Services like education and libraries are more readily linked to the county council due to visible references.

*"Just too many people trying to organise stuff. Better if it was just two or one [tiers]."*  
Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



### Complicated structure

Once residents understand Oxfordshire's local government structure, with different tiers delivering services side by side, many question its complexity.

They often express a spontaneous preference for a single council.

*"It just seems like it's 1 big pot of funding, lots of different levels of the council pulling for that. It seems like it's quite a complex system."*  
Male, Family, Urban area



### Importance of consultation

Despite the county council itself not being top of mind, residents show a keen interest in what future policy could look like.

They welcome consultation as a sign of transparency.

*"I'd like to see some transparency about the budget, how it's allocated don't feel it's shared openly."*  
Female, Family, Urban area

*"Involving communities so people feel like their voice is being heard, listened to and acted upon rather than people saying, we're going to do this."*  
Female, Older, Urban area

### A lack of awareness of how services are currently divided between the different tiers can lead to queries including:

- what is the reasoning for certain services being the responsibility of the district or county council?
- wouldn't it be more logical for the county council to handle planning and housing to ensure a county-wide perspective and avoid inconsistent policies in neighbouring areas?
- is the tiered system responsible for a lack of coordination of roadworks/traffic measures across the county?

*"It doesn't necessarily feel like there's a cohesive pattern to this.....Where's the overarching equality here to ensure that all areas are treated equally? Especially from the planning authority perspective, something might be allowed in one District Council and then a mile down the road, different District Council would be different."*  
Male, Family, Urban area

*"Why separate waste and recycling disposal from collection? It should be under one."*  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

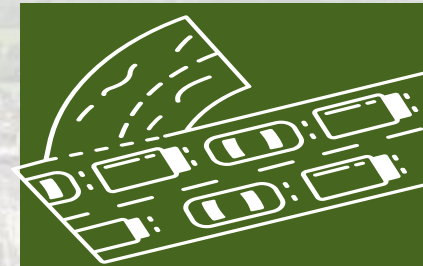


# Primary priorities for the future

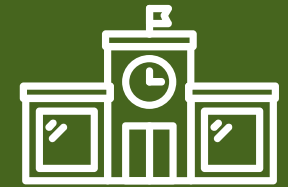
Residents identified multiple priorities spontaneously, but certain themes consistently emerged as areas where they feel the council should be focussing its efforts. These themes can be divided into primary and secondary areas of desired future focus:

Firstly, four primary priorities emerged as key areas which were consistently and strongly advocated for by residents regardless of age or background

## PRIMARY PRIORITIES



Transport/  
Traffic



Education



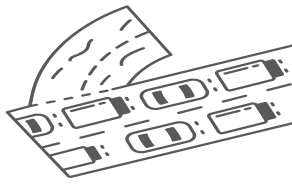
Healthcare



Social/  
Community



# Primary Priorities explored: Transport/Traffic



## PERCEPTIONS

- Potholes causing damage to vehicles / low quality repairs of potholes leading to repeat works
- Lack of planning of roadworks making it difficult to navigate diversions (especially Botley Road/Train Station works)
- Congestion in and around Oxford
- Bus network not reaching all areas/significant hubs such as John Radcliffe
- Affordability and reliability of buses
- Difficulties navigating Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

## SUGGESTED TACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Better coordination/planning of essential roadworks
- Ensuring quality of repairs to roads/potholes are sufficient to avoid redoing
- Better transparency over impact and plans for improvements/developments including expected benefits for residents
- Consideration of improved/new transport options such as more extensive bus network or introducing trams
- Review of possible schemes/ discounts to make bus journeys more affordable

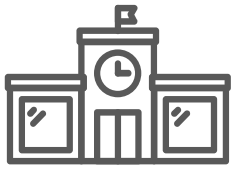
“The closure of the Botley Road has been an absolute nightmare. LTNs, I find it really stressful driving through because people that actually live there don't expect cars to be there so they just let their kids go out onto the streets.”  
Female, Younger, Rural area

“My car broke down the other week, and I had to use public transport, and it opened up my eyes to trying to get somewhere, it's just a headache.”  
Male, Family, Rural area

“Buses in particular, because it's a big form of transport within the county, so might as well just make it more frequent or just more convenient to use.”  
Female, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

NB: Congestion was not a specific focus of the research but given the consistent references, additional analysis is included within the appendix

# Primary Priorities explored: Education



## PERCEPTIONS

- Insufficient support for children with special needs cited within all groups regardless of personal experience
- Schools becoming over-populated, with class sizes too big
- Teacher and support staff not paid enough to stay within the sector
- Not enough opportunities to support young people into work or staying within the county
- All generations demonstrated concerns for the quality of education in the future

## SUGGESTED TACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Focus resources into supporting those with additional needs
- Increase pay for teachers and support staff to attract and retain them within Oxfordshire schools
- Ensure the infrastructure is in place to support increased population with access to relevant education
- Offer more vocational courses and/or apprenticeships for young people

“The lack of SEN provision and the coverage for, like those type of children. I think that's a massive issue at the moment.”

Female, Younger, Rural area

“I think you'd get better educational outcomes, if the classes were smaller and focus on SEN and all that.”

Male, Older, Urban area

“Paying teachers properly. That's like a fundamental going forward. If we're educating kids in Oxfordshire properly, they might stay around.”

Male, Family, Urban area



# Primary Priorities explored: Health



## PERCEPTIONS

- Prohibitively difficult to get GP appointment
- Impossible to join NHS dentist
- Concerns over the pay of NHS employees
- Mental Health services are insufficient or challenging to access when needed

## SUGGESTED TACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Council to work with health partners to identify gaps and plan improved access
- Ensure the infrastructure is in place to support increased population

“Banbury is losing so many medical facilities. There's no maternity unit here. Any specialist, we have to go down to Oxford, which is fine if you've got a car, but it's not very easy for a lot of elderly people.”

Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“They're so overworked and just need a pay rise because what they do is incredible, and they don't get the recognition for it.”

Female, Younger, Urban area

“Mental health services for children....there's a massive waiting list for people that need support.”

Female, Family, Rural area

“Doctor surgeries very, very difficult to get appointments. I think there's a shortage of NHS workers which is a shame.”

Male, Older, Urban area

# Primary Priorities explored: Social/Community



## PERCEPTIONS

- Loss of community through entertainment/retail closures
- Communal spaces such as community centres/youth clubs not well maintained
- Lack of reasons to come together
- Transient populations create difficulties in developing cohesion and integration
- Annual events no longer being hosted
- Commonly felt that strengthening community is a way to support improvement to secondary priorities

## SUGGESTED TACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Organise community-based initiatives
- Reinstate or introduce events for local residents
- Include residents in decision making of what should be happening within local areas
- Help to restore/regenerate social spaces such as community spaces

“Getting involved in like community spaces, with like allotments and growing things. And you know, being outdoors. Working and feeling a sense of community so doing something to actually bring the community together.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“An inclusive community. I think bits of these could be achieved by getting to that stage.... clean up the parks, have a chippy tea at the end of it. I just think you could tick a load of boxes by getting that real community aspect.”  
Male, Family, Urban area

“Community centres need a fresh identity. To be inclusive of everybody and not just, we're running a food bank today. I know they're needed but we need other things as well to attract more interest for people to use them.”  
Female, Older, Urban area

“Carnival that was on most summers, that's not been on for a few years. We used to have like a festival in central Oxford around summer, that doesn't happen anymore.”

Female, Younger, Rural area



# Secondary priorities for the future

Secondary priorities are also important to residents and often interlink with the primary areas of focus identified. Once again, there is notable consistency in the aspects being raised regardless of age or place of residence.

## SECONDARY PRIORITIES

Six secondary priorities emerge as areas which unquestionably deserve focus but not as urgently as the four primary priorities.

Residents feel that addressing some of the primary priorities could also automatically help to improve these issues.



Housing



Social care



Family support



Safety



Anti-social  
behaviour



Decline of  
High Streets

# Secondary priorities explored



## Housing

- Create more affordable housing
- Improve rent controls
- More protection of green spaces from development
- Ensure infrastructure to support housing development
- Balancing needs of current residents and new residents/students

“Looking at more schemes to keep people that have lived in that area for so many years. Capping the prices of housing so that the next generation of local people, can afford the houses around the local area.”  
Female, Family, Rural area

“Me and the wife rent but I know people that are trying to buy houses here and they're struggling.”  
Male, Younger, Urban area



## Social care

- Review levels of in-home support/ services for older people
- More affordable care home options
- Increased support for adults with additional needs

“The social care seems to be a massive issue for the Council...The social care is so expensive, you know, surely there must be a way of collectively having a ceiling for how much it costs.”  
Female, Older, Rural area

“The Council have a duty of care, and they wriggle out of it. I've seen it many, many times, and it's just disgraceful.”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



## Safety

- Better street lighting/active for longer periods
- Dealing with areas of high crime rate (especially cited by those living in wards with areas of higher deprivation)
- Police visibility countywide
- Provision of night bus service
- Safer/ dedicated cycleways

“It's more so winter time. We've got a dog, it's just not very nice walking around again for safety, but also just, you know, it's not very nice not having clearly lit street lights.”  
Female, Family, Urban area

“There's quite high crime rate around my area.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



## Family Support

- Increase support for poorer families (e.g. reduced rates for activities)
- Provide more youth support/facilities & engagement e.g. youth workers and youth clubs etc.
- Decrease waiting times for SEN diagnoses (e.g. autism)

“Things like the expense of going to a swimming pool. If you've got children or going to the facilities, but people can't afford them.”  
Female, Older, Urban area

“You have to fight so hard to get that extra support that your child absolutely needs to be able to learn on par with another child in the same class.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



## Anti-social behaviour

- Controls to limit damage & litter
- Provide more things for youths to do
- Limit rough sleeping
- Crack down on misuse of e-bikes/scooters (licenses needed/checked etc.)

“Litter and stuff just drags the place down a little bit..... nowadays, groups of youth, and you can feel quite intimidated. I feel for them, because, you know? Are they just hanging about because there's lack of stuff for them to do.”  
Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“My little lad has just learned to do hand stands. You take it into the park to do it but if the grass is not very well kept, you don't really know what's in there.”  
Male, Family, Urban area



## Decline of high streets

- Schemes to regenerate high streets
- Ensure rents/opportunities are attractive to new businesses
- Attract restaurants to areas outside the City
- Give Oxfordshire residents reasons to visit other towns/villages in the county (not just tourists)

“Oxfordshire's one of the most renowned and idyllic and beautiful places. It's a bit disheartening when you're walking down the street and another shop's closed or another business has gone under, it kind of takes away from the beauty of it.”  
Female, Family, Urban area

“People from Botley are just going well, we don't go into Oxford anymore. They go to the outskirts...The shops that were family-owned businesses, they've all shut up and gone.”  
Female, Older, Urban area





# Reactions to draft strategic vision

# Introducing the draft strategic vision

Residents were shown a draft strategic vision for the county council

## Draft 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 sustainable and inclusive economy that benefits everyone.



# Response to draft vision

Overall, there is positivity that the council is demonstrating a willingness to take action. However, a minority are more cynical about intentions and ability to deliver, particularly older residents.

- ✓
  - Feels aspirational
  - Language is very positive
  - Focusing on issues which resonate with the whole of UK
  - Matches priorities raised by residents
  - Shows a council that cares and is seeking to improve residents' lives

“I do like the bit where they've, you know, a strong and connected community. But it's all building blocks, isn't it, to make a house? So, they've got to start somewhere, I suppose.”  
Female, Older, Urban area

“I think they say healthier counties. So that's encouraging, you know, because there's so many things they can do to make us healthier.”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“It's, you know, it's always good to have a vision and nothing's ever perfect. It's always good to sort of strive for the next thing or the next improvement or to tackle issues as they come.”  
Female, Family, Urban area

“You can't disagree with anything here, because it's all good stuff, but the devil's in the detail. It's like, how are they actually going to achieve that? What do you really mean by fairer?”

Male, Older, Urban area

- ?
  - Too impersonal, vague and lacking in specifics or relevance to Oxfordshire itself
  - Does not include measurable aims and can therefore be interpreted as the council overpromising to try and tick the boxes
  - Confusion around some phrases e.g. 'inclusive economy'; 'healthy places'; 'strong and connected communities'
  - Suspicion this is a covert means of referencing greater restrictions on car use

“Healthy spaces to live. Everyone will sort of say that's obviously a good thing, and they obviously want that. But it's how would you go about doing that.”  
Male, Younger, Rural area

“What we do [to be green] doesn't matter and they're spending all this money on [being greener] when we've got other problems like education, NHS is struggling, and then you've got the military 3 big things. So, you know, I think it's like lip service.”  
Male, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“Because the thing with the statement, it was like greener, fairer. What's the marker? It's not really a target. It's like it wasn't stating that we want to be the best or there's no defined target. It's just, want to be greener. That could be one more blade of grass and that makes us greener.”  
Male, Family, Urban

“I look at this statement, and I feel as if it could be around restricting cars in certain areas.”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

# Taking the draft vision forward

Residents' reflections on the statement offer clear signals for refining and strengthening the vision, ensuring it not only addresses their concerns but also engages and resonates with them from the outset



## Critical aspects to monitor during further development:

- Use direct terms rather than 'buzz words'
- Reference specific priorities of residents (e.g. congestion, education, being safe) in measurable terms
- Ensure it sounds Oxfordshire specific
- Caution in referencing 'greener' as it is not a spontaneous priority of residents and ideally should not be the leading aim
- Claims of benefitting everyone seem impossible



# In residents' own words

“I love the first bit because I love the rural side of it, so making it greener, fairer.”  
Male, Younger, Urban area

“About the economy that benefits everyone. If that's in the lines of you know, cost the cost of the living. That's important.”  
Female, Family, Rural area

“It's interesting about the sustainable and inclusive economy that benefits everyone as that picks up some of the things we've said about.”  
Male, Family, Urban area

“It's being treated fairly instead of one community getting everything.”  
Female, Older, Urban area

“I'd be concerned how some of this is measurable, how do they measure the impact of inclusivity, how are they going to measure an impact of fairer.”  
Male, Family, Urban area

“It seems a bit wishy washy, its sort of seems like they've said everything a person would want to hear but ideally any community would be like this but it doesn't specify Oxfordshire.”  
Female, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“Well, can I just say, if they want to build 40,000 new houses. How is that going to be healthier with the amount of cars and better for the environment?”  
Female, Older, Rural area

“This statement here is probably a bit layered and coded, you just have to read into it and also I'd like them to be specific, what do you mean by greener, fairer and healthier, what does that look like?”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“What's inclusive economy mean?”  
Male, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“I just find its fancy words, as though it's a statement to appease.”  
Male, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



Stronger and connected communities

# How do people feel about 'stronger, connected communities'?

Residents like the reference to community within the vision, however, there is uncertainty on what 'strong and connected' means, leading to confusion and mixed interpretation



## Place-based

Most interpret this aspiration in terms of locality and building stronger individual communities through:

- Good communications between local councillors and the residents represented
- More community-based initiatives/ events
- Feeling heard and supported by the council
- Encouraging more opportunities to share resources between residents
- Designed into the planning of new developments

*"Being really integrated and connected in different ways. So, like sports, music, events... like physically allowing people to connect with each other."*

Female, Young, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

*"Proper money put into the community starting with community centres and organised youth clubs, design and tech or cooking or environmental education.... If you talk to the children and give them options."*

Female, Older, Urban area



## County networks

Others interpret it as an aim to build stronger networks across the county:

- Better transport links between towns, villages and key services
- Providing more events/things to do across different parts of the county
- Bringing different communities together
- Fairness across the county and bridging the wealth divide

*"Strong, connected. We go back to transport. You know, how are we gonna be strong? How are we gonna be connected? Are they going to revamp the bus services?"*

Male, Older, Rural area

*"Connected communities is what we're talking about with transport and just reaching those places. Also, such a divide between poorer people and richer people, and it would be really nice to sort of like bridge that gap."*

Female, Younger, Rural area



**Critical aspects to consider if having stronger and connected communities is to be included in the vision:**

- Term needs to be more explicit if council has specific interpretation
- If unclear, people will make their own assumptions and this may not match with council intentions leading to a disconnect and disappointment
- Most residents focus on their immediate place of home/work when thinking of community
- Some believe you cannot make people be community-minded

# In residents' own words

“This is very appealing isn't it, we have talked quite a lot about communities and this is centred around strong and connected communities.”

Female, Older, Urban area

“I would read that as like they're going to do things that make the sense of community stronger so perhaps events or community engagement.”

Female, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“I want someone to explain to me what is a strong and connected community, what is that, no idea.”

Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“You feel an area where the people in charge have people's best interest....people need to have a sense of enjoyment of where they live. And then, you know, that's about being with friends, it's about being happy in your day to day.”

Male, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“So maybe not a divide between rich and poor. Maybe a Council that listens to everyone.”

Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“It's what they mean, connected in terms of transport or a strong community that's connected like to one another? I don't think it's very clear what that actually is.”

Female, Younger, Urban area



# Healthier Oxfordshire

# Strategic Priority: Healthier

## Draft statement

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

## Draft Actions being explored

1. Continue to work with partners to support adults to live independently at home rather than going into care. This is an approach called the Oxfordshire Way.
2. Work with communities and partners to make local town centres vibrant, welcoming and accessible for everyone. This includes improving walking, wheeling, and public transport opportunities. Areas of focus include Witney, Banbury and Wantage.
3. Purchase and refurbish four new children's homes so that we can meet the needs of more children we care for in Oxfordshire, rather than out of county.
4. Build three new special schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities to help meet increasing demand, including one in Faringdon and two in the Didcot area.

Having a healthier Oxford viewed as a sound and positive aspiration for the council but knowing the detail is integral to resident advocacy

- Addressing health shows understanding of resident concerns
- Positive aspiration for the council
- Mixed expectations on whether this means service improvements or attempting to improve conditions to avoid need for services
- Including reference to 'safe' is welcomed
- Acknowledgement of different generations is important, but question why disability isn't referenced
- Council is showing it wants to embed building blocks to being healthier
- Wording can feel too ambiguous, particularly 'enabling children to get the best start in life'; 'helping older people to age well'

“I think safe's the one that the council can really focus on and have an influence over more so I'm happy with that.”  
Female, Family, Urban area

“It is a positive statement that there's nothing wrong with it, like it's all good things they want to do.”  
Female, Younger, Rural area

“It's idyllic. But again, helping older people to age well, remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. It's just like how?”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“Nice to know how they're gonna do this as well. What are their plans to achieve it?”  
Male, Family, Rural area

“What does it look like for children to get the best start in life?”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

- Healthier actions receive the most positive reaction across the statements from residents
- Real intention and specific examples which the council can be measured against is reassuring
- Actions match key areas of priority for residents (e.g. SEN needs; regenerating local town centres)
- Building new special schools identified as a key priority, reflecting earlier concerns
- References to partners raises rather than answers queries
- Minor concerns that adults living independently is cost cutting exercise to keep people out of care homes



“Some of these things aren't actually that relevant to me, but they stand out as being more beneficial...this feels more worthwhile.”  
Female, Younger, Urban area

“Special schools for children with special educational needs. I mean, that's like building free new schools. I mean, that would be amazing.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“I think just generally all 4 of those points recognise that the Council have a good understanding of the disconnect in the community.”  
Male, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

# Critical aspects for Healthier aim

Retaining a focus on a healthier Oxfordshire strongly resonates with residents and should form an integral part of the future vision for the county



## Critical aspects to monitor in refining the detail:

- Statement could be perceived as offering empty promises if phrases not fully understood
  - Use more explicit and universal language
- Having detailed objectives is integral to providing reassurance of plans which can be measured
  - Retain references to actual plans and locations of development as these provide reassurance and engagement with residents
- People want to know more about partners and distribution of responsibility
  - Outline who partners are and how responsibilities are distributed





# In residents' own words

““I like how positive it is, it gives you hope.”  
Female, Family, Rural area

““I think it demonstrates some ownership here, certainly in the latter three.”  
Male, Family, Urban area

““I would definitely say that the actions on this one are probably the best out of the ones we've seen.”  
Female, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

““I think to be honest, I think three and four, I think that like we've said that's very specific so you can hold them accountable.”  
Female, Younger, Rural area

““There is more detail there isn't there, which is what we've been saying.”  
Male, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

““What I like about these actions here are that they are a lot more specific than some of the other actions.”  
Male, Older, Urban area

““I think they all sound very good and it's like we've mentioned, it's having a plan in place of what they mean by their vision.”  
Female, Family, Urban area

““It's tricky. So, if they make cycle paths I'd actually like them to be so separate from the path.”  
Female, Older, Urban area

# Fairer Oxfordshire

# Strategic Priority: Fairer

## Draft statement

We want all our residents to benefit from the advantages our county has to offer so they can thrive. This means addressing social and health inequalities, providing equitable access to services, fostering an inclusive local economy whose benefits are felt by everyone, and supporting the creation of good-quality secure jobs in all sectors of the local economy.

## Draft Actions being explored

1. Work with partners to reduce social, economic and health inequalities in Oxfordshire, particularly inequalities in rural areas. This includes projects aimed at giving every child the best start in life, creating fair employment and good work for all, and ensuring a healthy standard of living for all.
2. Create more supported internships positions at the council and create more inclusive employment opportunities across Oxfordshire working with local partners.
3. Provide further support to young people as they leave local authority care and help them to become independent. This may include free transport, inclusive employment opportunities, free leisure passes etc.

Having a fairer county resonates with residents as they identify issues around cost of living, rich/poor divide, affordability of housing and public transport

- Statement references aspects viewed as big issues being experienced by residents
- Those living in wards with areas of higher deprivation particularly reference a need to know that there are intentions to help encourage a fairer way of living
- Reassuring to see the council aiming for a fairer society
- Mixed reactions to language; some feel it is too 'wordy' and 'difficult to digest', others strongly advocate the aims being outlined
- Some believe it is trying to be all things to all people and too much ambition can seem unrealistic
- Can struggle to interpret phrases such as 'inclusive local economy'; 'good-quality secure jobs'
- Scepticism that the council can influence or support creation of jobs in all economic sectors

“I think the statement is quite well put together in terms of being specific in its objectives.”  
Female, Young, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“It's about things that we've brought up that needs more action taken. And it's actually some of those things included here.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“What's a good quality secure job?”  
Male, Younger, Urban area

“It's a bit of a mouthful. I found it a bit hard to digest. I like the way it's focusing on the idea of addressing inequalities like, that's a good thing to do.”  
Male, Family, Rural area

“Give people credit for being able to understand what you're going to do, and just speak to people in straightforward terms.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

- In favour of supporting children and young people but important to state how this will be achieved
- Terms such as 'partners' are too vague/ ambiguous
- References to projects without naming them is too indistinct
- Mixed opinion on council internships; creating opportunities is a positive but are they paid?
- Greater support for children leaving care recognised as important priority for the council



“This looks like some proper KPIs that they can work to.”  
Male, Family, Urban area

“What's the specific service they're going to provide to give a child a good start in life because otherwise I don't know what that means.”  
Male, Younger, Urban area

“Who were the partners would be good to know, especially across all of these different areas.”  
Male, Family, Urban area



# Critical aspects for Fairer aim

Residents do desire a county which supports those who are more affected by the cost of living or struggling to find employment, housing etc. and the aim is therefore meaningful to them



## Critical aspects to monitor in refining the detail:

- Statement could be perceived as offering empty promises if phrases not fully understood
  - Use more explicit and universal language
  - 'Supporting skills development' may resonate more than creating 'good quality secure jobs in all sectors'
- Having fewer and more direct aims may be more powerful
  - Keep ambitions realistic to ensure they resonate with residents
- Having detailed objectives is integral to providing reassurance of plans which can be measured
  - Provide more references to existing plans and locations of development to provide reassurance and engagement with residents
- People want to know more about partners and distribution of responsibility
  - Outline who partners are and how responsibilities are distributed



# In residents' own words

““You can sort of picture what they're trying to achieve here. I feel like it's probably the most positive and the most sort of action drive statement.””

Male, Younger, Rural area

““I'm a bit confused about what some of it means, so what does that inclusive employment opportunities actually mean? What does that actually look like sort of thing? Same with giving every child the best start in life, everyone can agree with that but what does that actually look like? What are they going to implement? What's the specific service they are going to provide to give a child a good start in life cos otherwise I don't know what that means.””

Male, Younger, Urban area

““One thing that has struck me throughout this is that the word 'partners' is used a lot but who are they? Who are the partners?””

Male, Family, Urban area

““There's no such thing as a secure job so what people need really is I suppose generic skills.””

Male, Older, Urban area

““It's not something the council can do. You know, everybody wants a good quality secure job but there's no such thing as a secure job nowadays.””

Male, Older, Urban area

““It's okay saying these things but there's no substance behind it. It's almost like they've copied it from Government policies and procedures and just pasted it on.””

Male, Older, Rural area

# Greener Oxfordshire



Strategic Priority:  
Greener

Draft statement

We want our communities to have clean air, access to green space and the ability to move around safely and sustainably. This means cutting our carbon emissions, preserving and enhancing our natural environment, making Oxfordshire more resilient to a changing climate, and investing in an integrated and sustainable transport network.

Draft Actions  
being explored

1. Work with partners to improve the bus network in Oxfordshire and people's access to it, including in rural areas.
2. Deliver initiatives and infrastructure to help people make more journeys in way that is physically active such as walking, wheeling or cycling use. For example, by delivering new cycle ways.
3. Work with partners to make it easier for people to switch between different types of transport. For example, creating 'mobility hubs' at major railway stations, which bring together trains, buses and active travel such as cycle parking.
4. Take action to tackle localised flooding, for example through increasing the capacity of community flood wardens. Flood Wardens are volunteers who play an important role in the warning and prevention of flooding within their community.

Most understand and agree with aspirations to be greener, but it is not an instinctive priority

- Most challenged of the statements
- People want to do the right thing for the environment and understand why the council references being greener
- Reference to an integrated transport network is liked as it reflects earlier concerns
- Concerns by some that the main focus is on car use and not providing the necessary infrastructure to support alternative modes of transport
- Assumptions that this is ultimately leading to congestion charging and penalising car users
- Can be seen as contradictory – focusing on being greener but losing natural environments to housing and development

“I like all of it, because it means a better place for us all to live. But you know, can I afford to pay for it [emission/congestion charging] if that's what's going to happen? And the answer to that is, no, I can't.”  
Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“It just sounds like an excuse to charge.... emissions. It just means you're going to have to pay to go into that zone.”  
Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“Cutting our carbon emissions, it's so much demonising the driver the person that uses their car as their main form of transport. The transport network would need such a massive overhaul to become truly integrated.”  
Male, Younger, Rural area

?

- Good intentions but a lack of detail and actual plans on what/where things may happen
- Concerns over creation of more cycle ways rather than firstly encouraging people to cycle
- Desire for cycle ways to be clearly defined away from pedestrians/ cars
- Improving bus network viewed as a key priority, but has to be affordable or will not be used
- Dealing with flooding not viewed as a priority by most and some feel it shouldn't be left to volunteers

“It's not like cycle ways don't exist today. There has to be a want for them to be used.”  
Female, Younger, Urban area

“I like the way they've put a lot of inclusion as regard to public transport. You can see they've thought about that and put a lot of effort and focused in on it, points 1, 2, and 3 are all around the area. So that's good.”  
Male, Family, Rural area

“It concerns me where they say working with partners. Because does that mean that the prices of buses are gonna go even higher.”  
Female, Younger, Rural area

# Critical aspects for Greener aim

There is awareness and an affinity with the desire to have a greener county, however, the council needs to be cautious given it is not a spontaneous priority and can raise suspicion about its intentions



## Critical aspects to monitor in refining the detail:

- Have more specificity about aims
  - Do not only focus on what is needed but how council will achieve it
- Referencing reducing carbon emissions generally can cause concerns regarding means to do this
  - Ensure transparency around how the council intends to achieve this
- People want to know more about partners and distribution of responsibility
  - Outline who partners are and how responsibilities are distributed
- Residents do have their own ideas on how being greener could be achieved, especially the younger demographic
  - Utilise resident consultation and deliberation around ideas such as more EV charging points, smart housing and more affordable public transport
- Concerns that introducing additional cycle ways is not enough to encourage people to cycle more
  - Residents prefer more of a focus on improving public transport links and affordability



# In residents' own words

“I thought it was kind of contradictory. They want more green space but then they're building all the new houses on the green space that currently exists.”  
Male, Younger, Urban area

“It's about things that we've brought up that need action taken, it's actually some of those things included.”  
Female, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“So, improving a bus network to be able to get to those areas, I think would be fantastic.”  
Male, Younger, Urban area

“So, they've got to be really careful that they don't alienate the people who are trying to get around these cities.”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“Well, to me it just smacks of congestion charging Oxford coming our way.”  
Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

“They could raise the prices [of buses] and make the service perfect but then it's gonna suddenly make loads of people drop out of using them cos of the cost. So I think there's a fine line in getting it right and I think getting that right will be difficult.”  
Female, Younger, Rural area

“Working with partners, I mean in the first one yeah that's fine but who are these partners and if it's the bus services, they have commercial aspirations as well so I don't know practically how that actually works.”  
Male, Older, Urban area





# Conclusions & Recommendations

# Conclusions

Residents want to be engaged with the county council's vision and goals. They value living in Oxfordshire but seek clear and detailed plans for future direction to secure their support and trust.

## RESIDENT PRIORITIES

- Notable consistency of opinion among Oxfordshire residents when identifying priorities for future focus
- Key issues which they would like to see addressed include:
  - coordinated and higher quality road repairs
  - a need for more integrated, dependable, and cost-effective public transport, particularly bus services
  - improved education provision, particularly infrastructure to support a growing population, increased SEN services and staff pay rises
  - greater access to healthcare, including; GPs, dentists and mental health services
  - a stronger focus on community engagement—empowering residents to help address local issues and rebuild a sense of pride and shared responsibility for the county

## RESPONSES TO STRATEGY

- Residents understand the need for a vision, but it can become meaningless if not referencing issues relevant to them or the county specifically
- Having a healthier county resonates strongly with residents and having tangible actions demonstrates thought, planning and accountability
- Having a fairer county is welcomed as a sentiment but too broad an agenda can lead to confusion and cynicism
- Having a greener county is a more challenging aim. People want to do the right thing but concerns of covertly leading to additional charges alongside having alternative priorities around cost of living overshadow its resonance
- Strong and connected communities demonstrates understanding of a desire for greater community cohesion but lack of detail could lead to disconnect between resident expectations and council intentions
  - Most interpret it as supporting local communities with youth activities, improving social spaces and providing residents with the right skills/tools/services/events to help themselves etc.



# Recommendations

## **Ensure county council vision links to resident priorities and is credible**

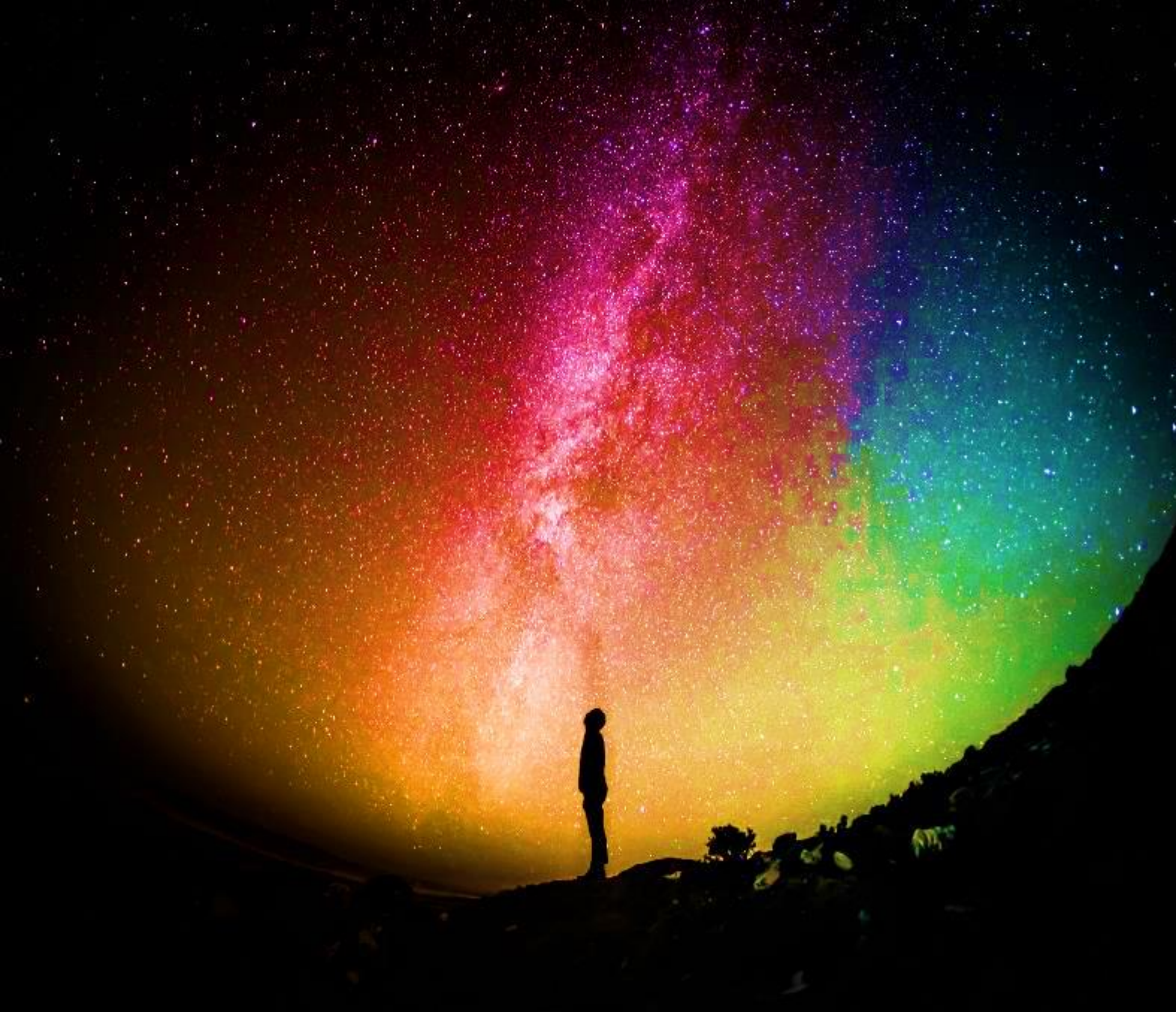
- Make it personal by referencing the big issues identified by residents
- Ensure it feels specific to Oxfordshire
- Have aims which are specific and can be measured
  - If too broad, people interpret and imagine outcomes in different ways leading to expectations not being met and disappointment
- Avoid 'buzz words', or vague references to demonstrate transparency
  - Use clear, direct and universal language
  - Provide details of partnerships and services if referenced

## **Focussing on being Healthier, Fairer and having connected communities does resonate**

- Important to retain these areas of focus
- Provide greater detail and specifics to ensure meaningful for residents
  - People want specifics and aims which they can instantly understand and interpret
  - Avoid broad references such as 'ageing well' or 'benefitting everyone' as viewed as too intangible leading to mistrust

## **Further consideration regarding the inclusion of being greener as a priority**

- Not top of mind for residents given perceptions of more pressing issues and cost of living
- If it is integral to the council to continue to include in its vision, ensure aims are transparent and have clear reasoning/benefits for residents
  - Address concerns regarding potential additional charges in relation to motor vehicles
  - Clearly outline plans and actions rather than broad aims



# REMind Research

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