STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

greener | fairer | healthier Oxfordshire

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Leader's foreword

I am pleased to introduce our Strategic Plan for 2025-2028 - a plan shaped by our ambition to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county for everyone.

Our vision is clear: we want Oxfordshire to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to live well, where communities thrive, and where our local economy benefits all our residents.

This plan sets out how we will work together to achieve these goals, building on our county's strengths while tackling the challenges we face.

We are committed to leading the way on climate action. Oxfordshire has already made significant progress: we have been recognised as the UK's top-performing county council for climate action and we have reduced emissions from our own operations by 70 per cent since 2010.

But we know there is more to do. The climate emergency is the defining challenge of our time and we must continue to act boldly to protect our environment, improve air quality, and help our communities adapt to the impacts of climate change, from flooding to heatwaves.

Fairness is at the heart of our approach. Oxfordshire is a prosperous county, but not everyone shares in that prosperity. Too many of our residents still face barriers to good jobs, affordable housing and essential services.

We are determined to tackle these inequalities - working with partners to address the root causes of disadvantage, supporting families and communities in need, and ensuring that everyone can access the opportunities our county has to offer.

Health and wellbeing underpin everything we do. We want all our residents to be happy, healthy and safe - whether that means giving children the best start in life, supporting older people to live independently, or helping everyone make healthy choices.

Our plan sets out how we will work with NHS partners, the voluntary sector, and local communities to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities.

This plan builds on our previous strategic plan, taking forward our vision for a greener, fairer and healthier county. But with local government reorganisation now in train, our focus is on delivering meaningful change in the next two years.

Our plan includes nine headline projects, with specific goals, in areas that residents have said are important to them – from a more responsive approach to road repairs to greater provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Delivering on this vision will require partnership, innovation and determination. We will continue to listen to our residents, work closely with our partners, and put the needs of our communities at the centre of everything we do. Together, we are building a greener, fairer and healthier Oxfordshire - now and for future generations.

**Councillor Liz Leffman
Leader of Oxfordshire County Council**

Our vision

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

What do we mean by a greener Oxfordshire?

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

Why is greener important?

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

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

These efforts are making a difference. Since 2010, emissions from our own buildings, fleet and streetlighting have decreased by 70 per cent. And in 2025 we have been rated the best performing county council in the UK for tackling climate change by Climate Emergency UK as well as being named the top performing county council for recycling for the eleventh year in a row.

But we need to do more. Transport accounts for 38 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire and is the highest emitting sector; associated air pollution directly affects people's health, particularly in congested urban areas.

Our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan sets out actions to create a net zero transport system, reducing the number of private car journeys; promoting public transport, cycling and walking; and increasing electric vehicle charging infrastructure. These steps will lower emissions and make our communities healthier and safer.

Making buildings more energy efficient and powering them with clean energy helps reduce costs, improve comfort and increase resilience.

We are delivering programmes to reduce energy costs and emissions in buildings across Oxfordshire - from retrofitting homes at risk of fuel poverty and supporting schools reduce their energy demand to working with larger businesses to plan for a clean energy future.

We are also working hard to reduce the emissions across our own estate, including a major programme of energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements to our buildings.

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

What do we mean by a fairer Oxfordshire?

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

Why is fairer important?

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

Twelve neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire are among the poorest 20 per cent nationally, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

About 20,000 children in Oxfordshire live in poverty–nearly 10 per cent of all children locally. And that rate exceeds 24 per cent in some of our most deprived areas, such as Rose Hill, Blackbird Leys and parts of Banbury.

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

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

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

To help address these issues, we are working with health partners, businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations, and the city and district councils to tackle the root causes of health inequalities, including housing, education and employment. This is our Marmot Place programme of work.

We are also ensuring that our services are easier to access and support is available locally through a network of family hubs. And for those facing hardship, we are providing financial support through our cost of living programme.

What do we mean by a healthier Oxfordshire?

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

Why is healthier important?

Good health is essential for individual and community wellbeing. Oxfordshire has a higher than average life expectancy, with men living to about 81 and women to 84. We also have lower rates of smoking and adult obesity than the England average. However, these averages hide significant differences.

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

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

Oxfordshire has an ageing population. About 18 per cent of our residents are over the age of 65 and this is set to rise to over 21 per cent by 2031.

The number of residents aged 85+ is rising fastest of all. Through proactive and preventative community outreach, we can help people live well and keep their independence for as long as possible. This is our Oxfordshire Way approach, in which we are working with health and community partners to support people close to home without the need for more formal care.

We will continue to view transport policy alongside these ambitions - keeping people connected and providing choice in how they choose to move.

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

Delivering our vision
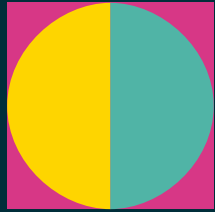
Our headline projects

Greener Oxfordshire

1. Create better spaces for residents and visitors in our town centres.

2. Work with transport partners towards a countywide integrated rail and bus offer.

3. Create two dedicated highways response teams to tackle issues in priority areas.

Fairer Oxfordshire

4. Roll out a network of family hubs.

5. Through initiatives like Connect to Work, help people overcome barriers to employment.

6. Support young people leaving care into employment.

Healthier Oxfordshire

7. Increase the number of children who reach a good level of development at age five.

8. Deliver more specialist school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

9. Support an expanded and coordinated programme of youth provision.

Greener Oxfordshire

Our headline projects

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

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

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

Greener Oxfordshire

Our wider objectives

- We will continue to roll out our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, which aims to cut carbon emissions from transport. This means encouraging people to use public transport, cycling and walking instead of driving.

- We will make it easier to travel by train, bus and bike by building mobility hubs across Oxfordshire. These are places where different types of transport come together, making it simple to switch between them. They also offer better facilities like sheltered waiting areas and bike storage.

- In rural areas, we will create quiet lanes / greenways to make walking, cycling and horse riding safer and more enjoyable. This includes continued partnership working with Buckinghamshire Council to progress a greenway link connecting Thame with Haddenham & Thame Parkway Station, securing the necessary powers and permissions for a suitable route alignment and submitting a planning application by 2027.

- We will improve how we deal with flooding by hiring more flood wardens to help local communities and by cleaning roadside drains every year.

- We will continue to reduce carbon emissions from our own buildings and vehicles and deliver our wider climate action and energy efficiency programmes with businesses, partners and communities. This includes installing 1,400 electric vehicle charging sockets across 250+ locations by 2027/28.

- We will speed up efforts to protect nature and wildlife in Oxfordshire, and we are working with partners to deliver the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
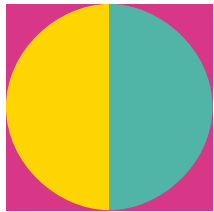
Fairer Oxfordshire

Our headline projects

1. We will roll out a network of family hubs across the county during 2026 and 2027 in areas of need. They will provide families with access to early help and support, including services from health, education and community sector partners, and they will be supplemented by a digital family hub.

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

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

Fairer Oxfordshire

Our wider objectives

- We will continue to work with local organisations to tackle the main causes of poor health, such as access to housing, education and jobs, through a joint programme called Marmot Place.

- We will make it easier for people to access local facilities and services by adding community spaces to our libraries, including 8 libraries by 2027.

- We will put our Including Everyone plan (2025-29) into action, which focuses on creating a more inclusive workplace, making sure our services are accessible, and reducing inequality in our communities.

- We will continue to improve support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) by working closely with partners through our SEND transformation programme.

- We will work with schools and other educational settings to deliver the goals of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024) and the upcoming SEND White Paper, making sure all children feel included and supported to succeed.

- Through our Future Generations programme, we will give children and young people more opportunities to influence council decisions and making sure we think about how our choices affect future generations.

Healthier Oxfordshire

Our headline projects

1. We will support children to get the best start in life. Working with health partners, we aim to increase the number of children in Oxfordshire who reach a good level of development at age five from 69 per cent to 77.8 per cent by 2028. We will focus our attention on children who qualify for free school meals.

2. We will deliver 240 more specialist school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across Oxfordshire by September 2027, with an intention to explore a further 100 places within that timeframe.

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

Healthier Oxfordshire

Our wider objectives

- We will continue to deliver the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including helping people of all ages improve their mental health, updating our Tobacco Control Strategy for 2026-30, and supporting residents to remain physically active – for example by walking and cycling.

- Through our Oxfordshire Way approach, we will continue to work with our health partners to help people stay independent, healthy and active in their communities for as long as possible, and we will continue to cut waiting times for care and financial support assessments - especially for people who may be at risk of harm or abuse.

- We will continue to support unpaid carers to improve their wellbeing and make sure they get the help they need.

- We will enhance our prevention initiatives to keep communities and individuals safe, from increasing our safe and well visits to vulnerable residents to engaging with more schools on issues such as road safety and water safety.

- We aim to become a Fostering Friendly Place, supporting local families to provide safe and loving homes for children in care.

- We will continue to work with communities most at risk of poor health to better understand the causes and to create action plans to improve their health and wellbeing.