Part 3: Housing Issues

The following issues are important when we are trying to develop new housing policies for Oxford. Please read about the issues and let us know whether or not you agree or disagree and if you have any suggestions. There are some questions at the end that may help to focus your comments.

Student Halls

What we know
Many full-time undergraduate students in Oxford live in halls of residence. Most Oxford University colleges house students in the City centre. Oxford Brookes University halls are focused in the Headington area, although some sites are located further away, and in residential areas. Some private colleges, such as language schools, also house some students in purpose-built student accommodation.

What could we do
Planning policy could guide student accommodation to locate on main streets, or close to the college it serves. Or policy could more strongly promote good on-site management.

Shared houses ('Houses in Multiple Occupation')

What we know
There are estimated to be over 5,000 shared houses classed as HMOs in Oxford. Some areas of Oxford have a high concentration of student occupied houses. Some feel this has led to imbalanced communities, and added to high property prices in the City.

What could we do
Planning policy currently only allows up to 25% of houses in any one street to become a large HMO (6+ people), whilst in the East Oxford area we do not allow any. We could further limit large HMOs by adopting a lower threshold. Or we could resist new HMOs altogether across the whole of Oxford.
Affordable housing

What we know
There are about 6,000 households on Oxford’s housing waiting list. Recently, there have been around 190 affordable dwellings completed each year. This is around 34% of all houses and flats built in Oxford. Most of these are social rented.

However, smaller developments of less than 10 dwellings do not currently have to provide any affordable housing. Economic circumstances may make it harder in future to insist on the same level of provision on some developments above 10.

What we could do
We could look again at what size developments should provide affordable housing. For example, smaller developments may have to make a contribution to meeting the need for cheaper houses to rent or buy.

We could also decrease the amount of affordable housing expected from medium-sized developments, so that sites are more likely to be developed quicker.

The tenure mix of new affordable houses - whether social rented, shared ownership, or some other arrangement - could also be changed.

Design of new homes

What we know
Oxford has a rich and varied townscape. There are 16 existing conservation areas, and a further one proposed. Many areas are densely built-up, and there will be further pressure to intensify given the acute need for housing.

What could we do
There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to residential design. Planning policy could however set out key principles on neighbourliness and setting, with supporting technical guidance on space standards and parking. Or, policy could refer to national guidance such as ‘Building for Life’.
Sustainability

What we know
Tackling climate change is a priority for the City Council. Oxford has for some years expected development to meet high sustainability standards and, in some cases, to produce some of their own energy requirements on-site. There are now national rules for reducing the energy and resources used by the homes we build, based on the ‘Code for Sustainable Homes’. All new homes in England will have to be ‘carbon neutral’ by 2016.

What could we do
We could amend planning policy so that more housing developments (including small ones) are required to meet the highest standards. We could also expect even more developments to generate some of their own energy. However, we must also make sure that new development is viable (that is, financially attractive to deliver), so that new housing continues to be built.

The types of things we would be interested to hear about are:

- Should we be giving more, or less, priority to allocating land for student accommodation?

- Should we be more specific about where new student accommodation is located? (e.g. close to Brookes Uni, or on main streets or mixed use areas)

- In East Oxford, current policy generally prohibits changing family dwellings into HMOs. Should we impose similar restrictions in other parts of Oxford? If so, where?

- We currently expect 50% of developments of 10 or more houses and flats to be affordable. Should we change the threshold for which sites make affordable housing provision? And should we vary the % requirement according to site size?

- How could planning policy better encourage quality design in homes, so that the impact of development on the local and wider area is positive?

- How should we expect developers to build sustainable homes?