



SEP Refresh FAQs

1. What is the purpose of a Strategic Economic Plan?

Guidance on Strategic Economic Plans was published by Government in July 2013. The full guidance document can be access [here](#).

The guidance states clearly that Local Enterprise Partnerships have a key role in providing leadership and establishing a strategic vision of growth for their area. Government is looking for an approach which brings together the Local Enterprise Partnership and its partners across the Local Enterprise Partnership area around a common growth agenda. It expects these plans to explain the drivers and barriers to growth specific to each Local Enterprise Partnership area, but to have regard to national policy on growth, including for example on housing, transport, skills, industrial strategy, flooding and rural economies.

So, our current [SEP](#) describes in detail the Oxfordshire economy - its attributes, challenges and opportunities. It also, as required by the guidance, sets out an agreed list of infrastructure and other projects to help enhance and grow the economy. The current SEP therefore was essentially a bidding document that allowed the government to apportion to Oxfordshire an element of the £2 billion available for such projects throughout England for the period 2015/6.

On the basis of our current SEP, we were allocated the following funding for infrastructure in Oxfordshire:

- £108.56 million for a range of road improvements
- A further £9.9 million for transport improvements in north Oxford and to the west of the city centre, and the establishment of the Activate Care Suite to improve adult social care and healthcare in Oxfordshire.

There is no set format for what a Strategic Economic Plan should look like. The guidance is clear however that planning policy and decisions will continue to be guided by Local Plans.

2. Why is the Oxfordshire LEP refreshing its SEP now?

Firstly, the timescales for producing the current SEP was very tight. The strict deadline for submission in March 2014 resulted in us not being able to consult as widely as we would have ideally liked. Whilst we were able to engage key stakeholders such as the Oxfordshire local authorities, universities, key environmental and community organisations, further education colleges etc, there

was no time to make the SEP available for public comment before the submission date. For this refresh, we have built in three workshop dates so that there is an opportunity for a wider range of partners to help shape the first draft of the SEP. This first draft will then be published on 21 April for a month's consultation period so that organisations, businesses, community groups and individuals can read the first draft of the SEP refresh document and have their say.

Secondly, we promised in the current SEP that we would do more work on our environmental assets and the contribution and importance they have for the local economy. This work is now complete and we published the [Oxfordshire Strategic Environmental Economic Investment Plan](#) in December 2015. Furthermore, we also made a commitment to undertake an in-depth study of our creative, cultural, heritage and tourism sectors to explore their contribution to the economy and quality of life in Oxfordshire, and how we can foster more collaboration and partnership working to enhance the Oxfordshire offer for residents and visitors alike. The Oxfordshire Creative, Cultural, Heritage and Tourism Investment Plan will be launched in early April 2016.

Both of these innovative pieces of work, along with the [Oxfordshire European Structural Investment Fund Plan](#) and an Oxfordshire Innovation Strategy, can now be fed into the SEP refresh.

We have also made great strides in other programmes including the [Oxfordshire Business Support \(OBS\) service](#), the [Oxfordshire Apprenticeships](#) programme, [O2i](#) (which brings together schools and local businesses to inform and inspire our young people about the opportunities available in our vibrant local economy), [Invest in Oxfordshire](#), and others. The SEP refresh gives us and our wider partners an opportunity to raise awareness of these important locally based programmes, and to celebrate the positive impacts they have had over the past two years.

Thirdly, our local planning authorities working together through the Oxfordshire Growth Board are busy working on working up spatial options for Oxford's unmet housing through their Local Plans. Given that the availability of housing is a vitally important factor for any local economy, it is essential that the SEP keeps abreast of policy as it emerges.

3. Is this the first time a plan has been prepared to guide and help grow the Oxfordshire economy?

No. In 2006 the then Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (which was disbanded in 2010 when the new Coalition Government came to power who wanted to establish Local Enterprise Partnerships instead) published the [Economic Development Strategy for Oxfordshire \(EDSO\)](#) to cover the period from 2006 to 2016. It is notable how the identified 15 themes outline on page 2 correlate very closely to the SEPs framework of People, Place, Enterprise and Connectivity.

In essence, the SEP can be regarded as a 'descendant' of the EDSO that moves us on from 2016. 'Strategic Economic Plan' was a name that the new Coalition Government in 2010 gave to traditional local 'Economic Development Strategies'.

We understand that the word ‘Plan’ as in Strategic Economic Plan may be misleading and could be misinterpreted as meaning a ‘development plan’ that sets out policy to guide and direct the building of physical development in a local area. We must stress that this is not the role of a SEP - physical development is guided by Local Plans which are prepared by the district and city councils as local planning authorities.

4. What is the scope of the SEP refresh?

This process is about “refreshing” the SEP - not fundamentally “rewriting” it - and there will be broad continuity and consistency with what has gone before (albeit with some updating and refocusing). Moreover, the LEP’s view is that momentum in delivery (which is currently strong) should be galvanised and accelerated through the process of refreshing the SEP, not stalled or side-tracked by it. Nevertheless, OxLEP is seeking an inclusive process, such that the refreshed SEP is fully and appropriately owned by a wide range of stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors.

Given the constraints under which it was prepared, OxLEP considers that the existing SEP has been an important document for Oxfordshire and that there is much that is “right” with it. This includes its thematic structure (with an emphasis on Innovative Enterprise, Innovative People, Innovative Place, and Innovative Connectivity); its overarching vision; and its delivery timescale (through to 2031). In addition, the scale of planned growth including working assumptions in relation to Oxford’s unmet housing need - has already been discussed and agreed through the Growth Board (informed by the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment).

However, two years on, much has changed and there is a need for a stock-take; a reflection of what has been achieved; and renewed focus. This has been given further impetus by the post-election commitment to LEPs and, hence, the need to clarify delivery priorities over the duration of the current parliament.

Within this overall context, the refreshed SEP will be informed by:

- the progress that has been made through other strategic processes led by the LEP; examples include the Strategic Environmental and Economic Investment Plan for Oxfordshire; the Oxfordshire Creative, Cultural, Heritage and Tourism Investment Plan (nearing completion); and the Oxfordshire European Structural Investment Plan (ESIF)
- wider strategic processes within Oxfordshire, including the Innovation Strategy (led by the University of Oxford) ; and the refresh of the Oxfordshire Skills Strategy
- major studies within the county (such as the Greenbelt study; the work to assess strategic spatial options for Oxford’s unmet needs and options

emerging through district and city Local Plans; the update of the Oxfordshire Innovation Engine; and the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Framework)

- wider developments linked to devolution and governance
- wider strategic processes including, inter alia, those linked to skills (including the refresh of the Oxfordshire Skills Strategy) and training (Local Area Review across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire); to transport and connectivity (alongside Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Luton, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire); and to broader economic growth narratives (across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire).

Compared to the original SEP, the intention is that the refreshed document:

- will be more succinct
- will be more strategic - with less detail at the project level but with a clear basis for prioritising interventions
- will be clearer as to its purpose - and its limits (i.e. it is not a strategic planning document)
- will be more clearly focused on the period to 2020 but with a longer term view to 2031 (consistent with the strategic planning framework)
- will be consistent with the LEP's formal status as a limited company.

5. How will the SEP refresh dovetail with the work on the Oxfordshire Strategic Infrastructure Strategy?

The SEP is a high level document which will have hooks across to the Oxfordshire Strategic Infrastructure Strategy - there is a dialogue between the two. Steps are being taken to align the two documents as they emerge.

6. Who is doing the work on the refresh?

Oxfordshire County Council, as accountable body for OxLEP, appointed SQW on 11 January 2016 to do the day-to-day work on the SEP refresh. They were selected under the county council's public procurement procedures.

7. What is the timetable for the SEP refresh?

Activity	Timescale
1. Inception meeting with selected consultant	W/B 11 January 2016
2. Desk-based research	12 Jan to 29 Jan

3. Workshops (by theme/geography) one to one consultations	1:1 consultations throughout Feb Workshops: 26 Feb, 29 Feb and 1 March
4. SEP Steering Group meeting - update on progress and key issues, challenges and opportunities	23 Feb
5. SEP Steering Group meeting - consultation period plans	21 March
6. Prepare for consultation period: • Develop consultation questions • Set up and test online comments system • Prepare press releases and social media campaign to raise awareness	March - April
7. First draft of SEP submitted	7 April
8. SEP Steering Group meeting - discussion on first draft	14 April
9. SEP document formatted/branded	14 to 19 April
10. Consultation period launched on 21 April	21 April to 20 May
11. Prepare consultation LEP responses document	20 May to 3 June
12. Publish LEP responses to consultation	9 June
13. Second draft submitted	23 June
14. SEP Steering Group - outcome of consultation period and discussion on second draft	5 July
15. Final draft agreed and ratified by LEP Board	September

8. What are the governance arrangements for the SEP refresh?

We have established a Steering Group that will oversee the SEP refresh. The organisations on the Steering Group are:

Organisation	Theme
Oxfordshire Skills Board	People
OxLEP - Business Support Sub Group	Enterprise
South Oxfordshire DC and Vale of the White Horse DC	Place
Invest in Oxfordshire sub Group	Enterprise

Oxfordshire County Council	Place/connectivity/ people
Cherwell DC	Place
Oxford City Council	Place
Oxford Brookes University	People/enterprise
West Oxfordshire DC	Place
Experience Oxfordshire	Place/enterprise
Earth Trust /TOE2	Place
University of Oxford	Enterprise
Environment Agency	Place
Oxfordshire Business Support - Network Navigator for social enterprise	People/enterprise
Abingdon& Witney College	People
Oxfordshire Community First	People/place
OCVA	People - Third sector

9. On what basis were these organisations selected?

The local authorities are democratically elected organisations who undertake a range of statutory duties that impact on the local economy (schools, roads and transport, local planning authorities) so it is vital they are part of the Steering Group.

The Universities are major institutions and our two further education colleges are major contributors in providing essential skills for local businesses.

The [Environment Agency](#), [TOE2](#), the [Earth Trust](#) were selected for their expertise and knowledge of the Oxfordshire environment, and their ability to connect and communicate with the huge number of environmental groups within the county.

[Experience Oxfordshire](#) is the key organisation for tourism and destination management in Oxfordshire. Tourism is a key sector of the Oxfordshire economy, whilst representatives of OxLEPs own Inward Investment and Business Support sub groups can ensure that the voice of business is represented.

[Community First Oxfordshire](#) supports Oxfordshire's communities in all locations on health, housing, transport and community enterprise, whilst [OCVA](#) acts as an umbrella organisation for the community, voluntary and faith sectors in Oxfordshire

10. What role will the local authorities and the Growth Board play?

All the Oxfordshire local authorities are represented on the Steering Group. The local authorities will wish to debate and consider the SEP refresh at their Cabinet and/or Full Council meetings. The OxLEP Chief Executive will make every effort to attend these meetings and support the discussions as required.

We will be reporting on progress and taking the SEP refresh to the Growth Board at all of its meetings between now and September. We would anticipate the Growth Board will be asked to endorse the refreshed SEP as well as the individual Local Authority consideration detailed above.

11. How can I be involved in the refresh?

We held three workshops in Oxford and then in the north and south of the county on 26, 29 February and on 1 March respectively to collate views from a wide range of 263 stakeholders and interested parties.

A paper that sets out the points raised by delegates at each session is being compiled and will be available shortly.

We expect a first draft of the SEP refresh on 7 April. The Steering Group will meet on 14 April to discuss the draft. We will then publish the document for a public consultation period to take place between 21 April and 20 May. The consultation exercise will be supported by a key questions document, but respondents will have the opportunity to freely express their views via the web site should they wish to input via a comments section.

If you would like to be included on our consultation list, please register [here](#)

12. Will you make the consultation responses and your answers to points raised public?

Yes. We aim to publish an *Oxfordshire SEP Consultation Response* document on 26 May. We will not be making public the names of individuals, groups and organisations who responded, just the points raised and our response in return.

13. The current SEP has generated much interest locally, especially around the numbers relating to housing need. Is the LEP proposing that 100,000 new homes are built in Oxfordshire in the next 15 years?

No. The SEP quotes the findings of the [Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#) (which was commissioned and funded jointly by all six local authorities in Oxfordshire through the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (SPIP) in November 2012 and published in March 2014 - Both SPIP and LTB (Local Transport Board) are now incorporated into the Oxfordshire Growth Board) in the context of the importance of the availability of housing to a local economy.

The number of new homes to be built, and where they will be built, will be determined by the democratically elected district and city councils as local planning authorities through the Local Plan process over the next two years.

Information on the Local Plan process can be found at the following district and city council websites:

www.cherwell.gov.uk/planning

www.oxford.gov.uk/planning

www.southoxon.gov.uk/planning

www.valeofwhitehorse.gov.uk/planning

www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning

One of the tests of a Local Plan at Examination is whether the plan takes account of an up to date housing market assessment (in the National Planning Policy Framework). The SHMA has already been tested at one Examination, for Cherwell District Council in June and December 2014 and is set out in the Inspectors report June 2015 as being the right basis for the proposed level of housing growth in Cherwell. We understand that it is uncomfortable for some, but the SHMA is now the evidence document which underpins the development of all Local Plans in Oxfordshire.

- 14. This is the first time there has been any public consultation on the SEP. Are those stakeholders who feel the housing and jobs growth figures are over-inflated and unsustainable able to comment on these?**

Stakeholders and individuals are welcome to make any comments that they feel are of merit.

However, we would ask those who wish to make comments to recognise and accept that the LEP are not the “owners” of the overall housing growth figures contained on the SHMA, nor on its own the job growth figures that came out of the **Oxfordshire Economic Forecasting Report**. Vale of the White Horse DC commissioned this report on behalf of the City and Districts Council’s to underpin the SHMA, and for the LEP to use as evidence of job growth to include in the first SEP. The LEP/SEP is informed by the outcome from the SHMA process, but has not generated the numbers. The LEP supports these figures and does not consider them to be either over-inflated or unsustainable. We must be clear with potential consultees that this stance will not change, and we will reiterate this position during the consultation period itself.

We will also make it very clear that the LEP (as a private not for profit limited company) is **not** the body responsible for making land use planning decisions, nor is it responsible for undertaking environmental assessments - this is the role of the local planning authorities through the Local Plan process.

- 15. Some stakeholders consider that the notional job targets are leading to actual housing figures. There are no brakes, caveats, or checkpoints. This means that valuable land is being released now, without really knowing whether or not it will be needed and with no fall-back position. Could OxLEP bend the proposed growth according to the likelihood of its coming to fruition?**

The jobs figures are a “target” insofar as they will inform provision. They are actually based on projections linked to Oxfordshire’s sectors. In fact, the “target” is for a lower rate of jobs growth than has been achieved historically (1981-2011), and the rate of jobs growth over the period 2011-14 has been significantly higher than the trajectory implied by the jobs growth figure for 2011-31. Therefore although the numbers sound large, the expected scale of jobs growth 2011-31 is not particularly aggressive.

16. Some stakeholders consider that the growth targets are being used to justify development on the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. How can this be considered ‘sustainable’?

This is a matter for Local Plans. The SEP articulates the Knowledge Spine, including Bicester, Oxford and Science Vale, as the principal area of growth in the county. However, it does not, and will not, identify specific areas that should be developed.

If there is a case for a Green Belt review, or for development in the AoNB, this will have to go through a full process linked to the statutory planning process via Local Plans.

17. How are the social and environmental impacts of an all-out growth strategy being considered? Where the effects would be considered unacceptable, how will growth targets be tailored?

The purpose of the LEP is to support economic growth in Oxfordshire. The SEP is therefore specifically focused on economic enhancement in its widest sense - support for businesses, workforce skills development, apprenticeship provision, social inclusion etc. It will also seek to ensure that economic growth is sustainable and delivers social and environmental as well as economic benefits. However, the balancing of these three factors - economic, social and environmental - will occur through the development and testing of Local Plans. Local Plans are statutory documents, the SEP is not.

18. If the current SEP (and the refreshed SEP) is not to be considered 'a strategic planning document', why is it called a Strategic Economic Plan? What does OxLEP consider to be the strategic planning document for Oxfordshire?

The expression “Strategic Economic Plan” was one invented by the new government in 2010 - see Q3. Previous ‘plans’ to enhance the local economy were referred to as ‘Economic Development Strategies’. The strategic planning documents for Oxfordshire are the district and city-wide Local Plans.

19. Why is housing mentioned in the SEP?

In line with the guidance published by government in July 2013 on what Strategic Economic Plans need to have regard to (see Q1), the SEP articulates how OxLEP

and its wider partners want Oxfordshire's economy to grow and develop in the coming years taking into account a range of local and national factors. The cost and availability of suitable housing is a key factor in the success (or not) of the economy in a local area. We know from our partners, including the NHS University Hospitals Trust - see [http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/14111373.Oxfordshire s hospitals lose 1 500 workers per year because of the cost of living/](http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/14111373.Oxfordshire_s_hospitals_lose_1_500_workers_per_year_because_of_the_cost_of_living/)

and private sector businesses, that the very high cost of renting or buying a home in the county is having a detrimental effect on their ability to recruit and retain staff.

Furthermore a recent study of house prices to earnings ratio by Oxford University Professor Dorling (February 2016) - see <http://www.dannydorling.org/?p=4476> shows that in January 2015 the ratio of average house prices to incomes in Oxford was over 15 times the average annual income as compared to 14 in London. According to Professor Dorling, the average cost of a house in Oxford is £426,720, well out stripping the average income of £26,500 of Oxford workers. This is reinforced by similar findings from the London-based Centre for Cities think tank which has found Oxford's housing is now the least affordable in the country.

The [Economic Development Strategy for Oxfordshire 2011-2016](#) also highlighted the issue of a lack of housing that is affordable in Oxfordshire as mentioned in Q3 - and matters have got much worse since.

20. Do you have additional questions?

Please email info@oxfordshirelep.com