

## Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth & Oxfordshire Plan 2050

### Workshop – 5<sup>th</sup> October 2019

### Summary of Workshop

#### Introduction

We want to keep Oxfordshire a world leader in technology and innovation, ensure there are plenty of good well-paid jobs, preserve the history and heritage that draws millions of tourists each year, and give our children and grandchildren the opportunity to own homes in the county we love.

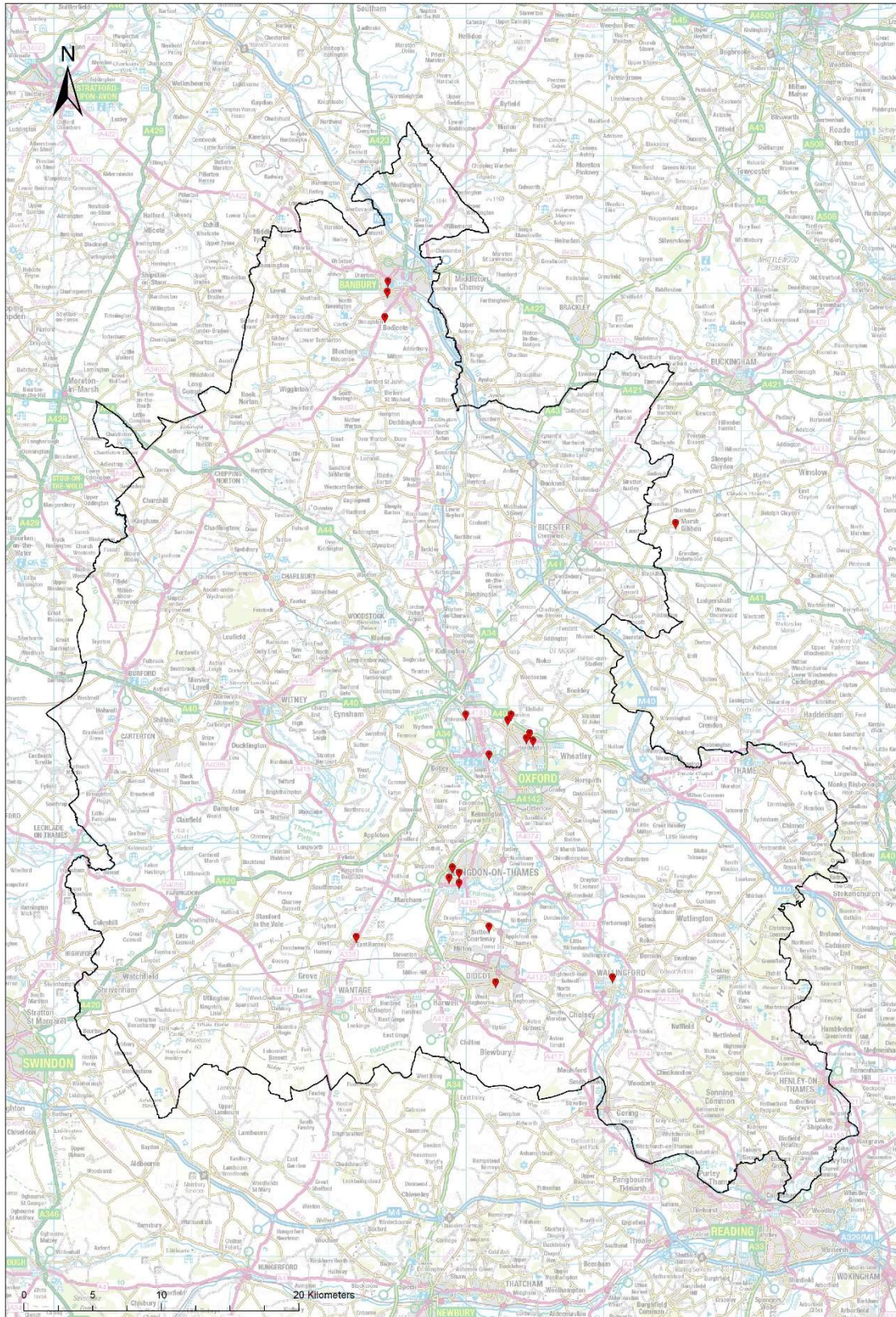
We want to achieve this while maintaining the amazing environment we live in and tackling climate change.

Oxfordshire's local authorities are working together to produce the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This will be a strategic planning document to guide future growth and development in the county. In order to produce the Plan, we are listening to residents, business and organisation to understand their aspirations and priorities for the future.

Today's young people will be the biggest beneficiaries of the Plan come 2050 and so it is vital to discover what their hopes, aspirations, concerns and challenges are for the future. That way we will be better placed to reflect their views in the Plan and shape it to help secure better lives for all by 2050.

Representatives from the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Team ran a session within the Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth (VOXY) Environmental Impact Campaign event, taking place at County Hall, Oxford on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Twenty-three young people aged between 11 and 25 from around the county took part in the workshops.

The session included a variety of exercises and longer group discussions to get the young people thinking about what they want Oxfordshire to look like in 2050. They were first asked to place a pin on a map of Oxfordshire to show where they were currently living.



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The participants were asked to describe where they lived in three words: (the most frequent responses are shown in larger text)



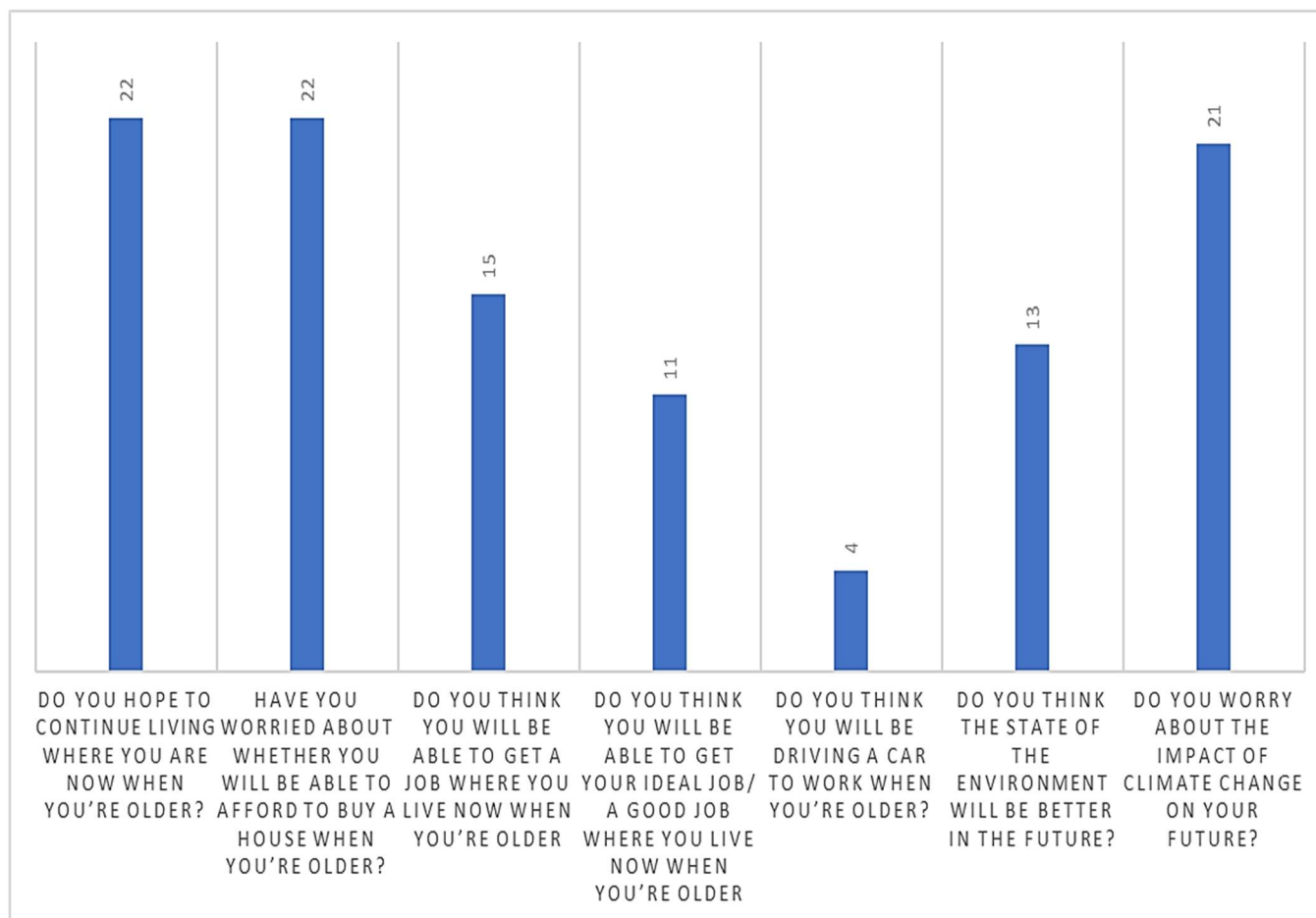
Then, the groups were asked what three things they would like to see improved where they live:



Finally, they were asked what three things make somewhere a good place to live:

Variety of things to do  
Diversity  
Clean  
Accessibility  
Areas to socialise  
Cycle lanes  
Spaces are safe and welcoming  
Plenty of funding for schools  
Fewer shops  
Less traffic  
Less pollution  
Quiet  
Facilities near by  
Using clean energy  
Lots of shops / easy access to shops  
Schools near homes

The group took part in an exercise to get them thinking about their future in 2050. Twenty-three participants stood in a line and stepped forward if they wished to answer yes to the question. The number of “yes” responses are shown in the chart below.



The participants were then split into three groups and rotated around discussion tables looking at the themes of The Environment, Connectivity and Communities, and Housing and the Economy. Discussion was prompted through a series of open questions and moderated by a member of either the Plan team or a VOXY facilitator. The key points raised for each topic are summarised below.

## Environment

The group agreed more public transport use, cycling and walking should be encouraged across the county to improve sustainability and alleviate the amount of pollution caused by traffic. Discussion around why people are discouraged from using these modes of transport found that for young people the quality and safety of roads was a concern for those wishing to cycle. Improvements to cycle lanes and paths was considered a good solution but not at the expense of trees. Opinion on bus services varied depending on where people lived. Some suggested more frequent and direct services are needed to discourage car use. A lack of facilities and shops in villages was also put forward as a factor that increased car use.

Most young people lived in urban and suburban environments and Cowley was considered an attractive urban environment due to its culture, variety of facilities and good sense of community. Green spaces were considered important by most, agreeing having access to wild spaces within urban areas is important for mind, exercise and escaping daily stresses. Abingdon was identified as a good example of somewhere with green space. Many noted that nature reserves and the countryside were difficult to access by public transport or bike and most fields are not publicly accessible. The loss of green space for development was a concern in addition to development being close to flood plains and rivers.

One group discussed the theme of social responsibility for our environment and planet. They believed it should be instilled in people from a young age and those who recycle and reuse should be supported and rewarded - including business.

One group identified the main environmental threats as: building and development; traffic and car use; people's lack of responsibility; antisocial behaviour and threats to air quality.

- **More sustainable transport use is needed. Improvements to road safety and public transport frequency needs to be made.**
- **Having access to wild spaces within urban areas is important for mind, exercise and escaping daily stresses.**
- **There should be more environmental social responsibility in communities, supporting and rewarding those who take part in environmentally friendly initiatives.**

## Connectivity

Buses were the main form of transport discussed with the price of tickets and the frequency of services being their main concerns. All groups mentioned wanting a reduced fare for their age group and for more school buses to be available and free to use. Attitudes towards bus frequency varied depending on where people lived but most agreed that there should be more bus services and especially more at night with better safety measures put in place.

Looking ahead to 2050 different forms of sustainable transport were put forward as options for Oxfordshire including trams, trolley buses and an underground rail network. App-based public transport such as the Pick Me Up service in Oxford and Pony Bikes cycle-hire scheme were also popular among the group, with many wishing to see them expanded across the county.

Once more the incentives behind using public transport were highlighted with safety being the key concern both on roads and for bike storage especially at schools. Incentives for using electric vehicles were discussed in addition to proposals for electric bike schemes for those unable to cycle. The groups felt improving and enhancing these modes of public transport would lead to less car use and therefore have positive impacts for the environment.

The groups hoped that in 2050 working patterns would be more flexible and commutes less busy or frequent. Ideas to support this included having business units or hubs in local communities that would be for multiple use for people of all ages. It was proposed such hubs would provide hotdesking and networking facilities and would be located close to public transport links.

Improvements to digital connectivity was also thought to be important especially for those who are less able to travel. Some wanted to see better WIFI on public transport as well as at stations and bus stops so the commute could be factored into a working or school day.

- **Better value and more frequent public transport.**
- **More incentives to use public transport – safety and financial incentives.**
- **Improve digital connectivity and encourage more flexible working patterns.**



## Communities

Community youth centres closing and lack of facilities for young people were prominent concerns among all the groups of young people. Some felt reopening such venues could have a positive impact on antisocial behaviour and mental health among their peers.

The group discussed how facilities varied depending on if you live in an urban or rural environment, impacting how far you need to travel and what form of transport you use. Most only accessed the countryside using cars with their family and agreed that access via public transport would encourage them to experience the countryside more often.

Some thought ahead to their future careers - it was suggested not enough has been done to help young people with careers guidance or work placements. Some felt their school, or the Council was not providing resources such as careers fairs and those that did were not well advertised.

A positive experience of communities came from one young person living in a new build estate in Northway, Marston. They said as the housing was built around a park and community centre children felt safe to play outdoors and there was a community hub with activities and events.

- **Open youth centres and facilities for young people.**
- **Improve accessibility to countryside through better public transport links.**
- **Young people want more careers guidance and opportunities for work experience.**

## Housing and Economy

Discussion was focused around the type and location of homes and how to best use space in the county. Most liked the idea of sharing homes while they were in their 20s but wanted to own their own home by 2050. Some were concerned that this might be unrealistic and recognised that many homes are not currently affordable.

Some had ambitions to build their own homes, allowing them to incorporate renewable design elements into this such as wind turbines. This led onto conversations about the current standards of house building. Suggestions were made for standards to be raised and for developments to be stopped if they do not meet certain standards eg zero-carbon.

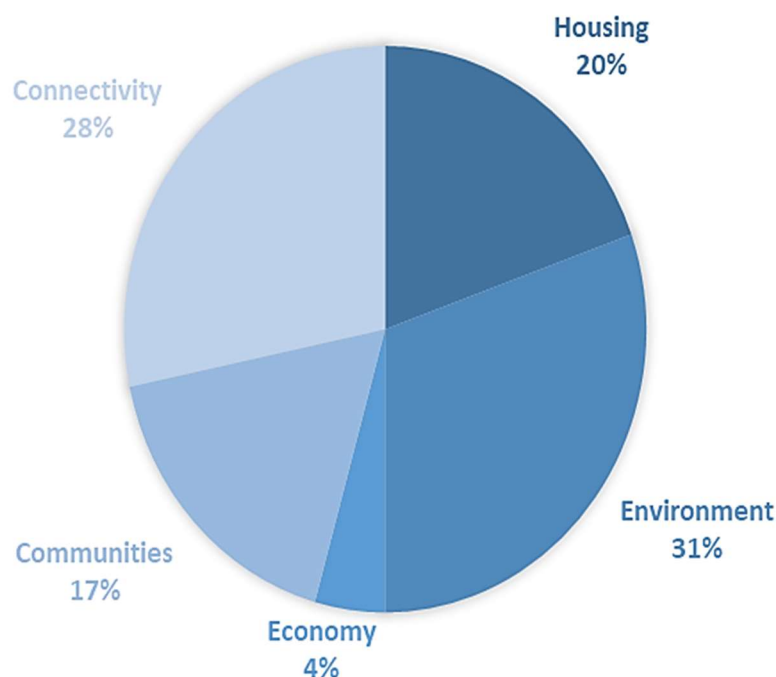
When thinking about how we use space some felt restoring old properties would be a good solution, identifying that there were lots of empty homes in their communities. Brownfield sites and unused industrial land were put forward as the best places to develop. Many felt that flats and high-rise buildings were a good use of space, but the Grenfell Tower fire was mentioned by numerous young people as making them worry about safety in such homes. There was a general feeling that we could be more innovative with the way we think about housing and use of space and that the group wanted homes to be more affordable and to balance growth needs with sustainability.

In terms of where development should be located, many expressed concerns over the lack of infrastructure to support new housing. Wallingford was given as an example of a town where more houses have been built but there were not enough GP places to accommodate this. Another young person mentioned that at Longford Park (in Banbury) a school was built long after the housing development took place. In terms of transport and traffic, Abingdon, East Hanney and Didcot were thought to be at capacity by those who lived there. Some preferred the idea of building new towns planned long-term from the beginning.

When discussing future careers some thought about going to University but mentioned that there are other important skills we need such as the ability to network that are just as important as academic qualifications. More flexible working patterns were considered an important part of the group's future careers, with some also stating they liked the idea of running their own business. Some young people expressed concerns about AI and its role in reducing the amount of jobs available.

- **We need to be more innovative about the design and location of our homes, so we balance growth with sustainability.**
- **Infrastructure needs to be in place first to support more homes.**
- **Flexible working patterns should be a part of future careers.**

At the end of the session all groups were asked to choose two topics from those discussed through the sessions they felt were the most important. The results are shown in the graph below:



## Conclusion

Young people are clearly aware of the challenges facing them in the future and concerned about the impact they may have on their lives. Big issues such as housing, community and climate change resonate just as strongly among those under 25 as their elders. But there was also optimism about the future, with plenty of ideas and energy in how decisions taken now will result in positive change in the future. Young people recognised the difficult decisions that need to be taken and were keen to be part of the conversation throughout the Plan-making process.

## Next steps

The thoughts and ideas generated at the workshop will now feed into the next stage of the Plan. They will help to make sure that the views of young people are taken into account and they have a say on the future of Oxfordshire and how it changes over the next 30 years.