



2. West Oxfordshire in 2016

Chipping Norton

2.1 In this section we set out a brief profile of West Oxfordshire, the purpose of which is to identify the key issues and challenges facing the District both now and in the future. This is important because it helps to ensure that the remainder of the Local Plan focuses on those issues of greatest local importance to West Oxfordshire.

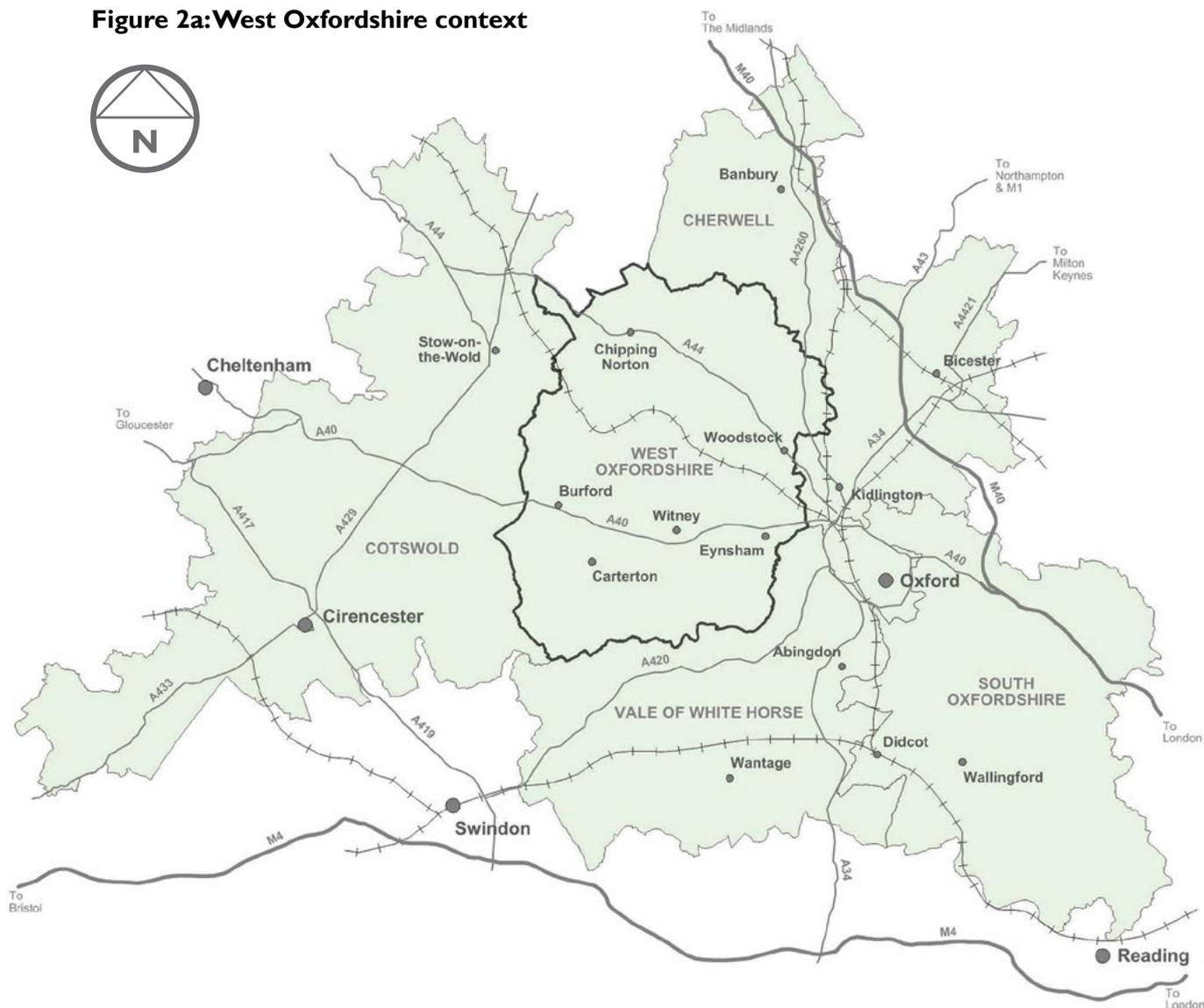
Location

2.2 West Oxfordshire is located in the south east of England in the County of Oxfordshire, which has borders with Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The District's central location, coupled with its high environmental quality makes it an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Character

2.3 West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural area and enjoys a strong sense of place derived from the Cotswold vernacular style of building, rolling countryside and river valleys. With a population density of 1.5 people per hectare, it is the second most sparsely populated of the 67 local authorities in South East England with almost 60% of its 81 parishes containing fewer than 500 residents. Around one third of the District falls within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Figure 2a: West Oxfordshire context



© Crown copyright and database rights 2015. Ordnance Survey 100024316. Use of this data is subject to terms and conditions.

- 2.4 There are around 130 separate towns, villages and hamlets scattered across the District. The three main towns are Witney (population 28,000) Carterton (16,000) and Chipping Norton (6,500)². Notably, whilst these all offer a good range of services and facilities, none are served by rail (see below).
- 2.5 Currently supporting the three main towns are six rural service centres including Bampton (population 2,500) Burford (1,300) Charlbury (3,000) Eynsham (5,000) Long Hanborough (2,400) and Woodstock (3,000)³. These service centres generally offer a good range of services and facilities. Long Hanborough and Charlbury benefit from railway stations serving the Cotswold rail line.
- 2.6 A new rural service centre is proposed to be created through this Local Plan in the form of a new Garden Village on land to the north of the A40 near Eynsham and close to Hanborough Station on the Cotswold line. This could exceed a population of 4,000 by 2031 and will need to develop a critical mass of services and facilities.
- 2.7 The District's remaining settlements comprise a number of medium-sized and smaller villages and hamlets.

Relationship to other areas

- 2.8 The District has strong functional links with a number of other areas. In economic terms, travel to work data⁴ indicates that the closest links are with Oxford City, which performs a 'City-Region' role, Cherwell District and the Vale of White Horse District. There are also links with South Oxfordshire, Swindon, Cotswold and London, albeit less pronounced.
- 2.9 As might be expected the proportions working in Oxford are highest in the east of the District at Woodstock and Eynsham where around 30% of workers work in Oxford and are lowest in the rural west of the District including Burford and Carterton.

- 2.10 In terms of housing, West Oxfordshire falls within the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area (HMA) which is largely contiguous with the County boundary. Importantly, this Local Plan seeks not only to meet the identified housing needs of West Oxfordshire District but also to make additional provision to accommodate a proportion of 'unmet' housing need that Oxford City are unable to provide for within their own administrative boundary.

Population and demographics

- 2.11 West Oxfordshire has a total population of around 108,000 people⁵, which is much lower than the other Oxfordshire authorities, reflecting the rural character of the District.
- 2.12 The population is reasonably well-balanced in terms of different age groups. There is a similar proportion (19%) of young people (aged 0 – 15) compared to the national and regional averages although the proportion of older people (aged 65 or over) is slightly higher than average. These proportions are forecast to remain broadly the same.
- 2.13 Almost 62% of the population are of working age (16 – 64) slightly below the regional average of 62.7% and the national average of 63%.
- 2.14 The significant majority of residents of West Oxfordshire are white British/Irish with just 6.8% of the population being non-white British/Irish, well below the county average of 15.4%, regional average of 13.9% and national average of 19.3%.

Housing

- 2.15 According to the 2011 Census there were around 43,200 households in West Oxfordshire, an increase of 4,800 since 2001. Most of this growth has taken place at Witney and Carterton through major new housing developments including Madley Park and Shilton Park.

2 2011 Census

3 2011 Census

4 2011 Census

5 ONS 2013 mid-year population estimate

- 2.16 Levels of owner-occupation have increased since 2001 and at 69.7%⁶, sit above the county, regional and national averages. In keeping with national trends, the proportion of people renting privately has increased since 2001 although at 16.6%⁷ remains below the county, regional and national averages. Levels of private renting are particularly strong in Carterton.
- 2.17 In terms of the type of housing available, the District is dominated by a high proportion of detached properties which comprise almost 35% of the total housing stock, followed by semi-detached (32%) and terraced properties (23%). The proportion of flats/maisonettes available at just over 10% is lower than any other Oxfordshire authority. The majority of flats are located in Chipping Norton, Witney and Carterton.
- 2.18 In terms of house sizes, West Oxfordshire is characterised by a reasonable balance of property sizes as follows:
- 6.8% - 5 or more bedrooms
 - 20% - 4 bedrooms
 - 40.8% - 3 bedrooms
 - 24.9% - 2 bedrooms
 - 7.3% - 1 bedroom
- 2.19 In terms of housing affordability house prices in West Oxfordshire are above the national average and this reflects its location in a desirable and relatively prosperous County. Prices in West Oxfordshire remain below the county average, which is skewed by very high prices in Oxford City and South Oxfordshire in particular.
- 2.20 The housing affordability ratio shows the relationship between house prices and income. In 2015 the ratio for West Oxfordshire was 10.35, considerably higher than the national average (7) and only slightly lower than Oxford City (11.56). This means that even the cheapest properties in West Oxfordshire are around 10 times the lowest incomes. As of 1 April 2015 there were around 1,440 households on the waiting list for affordable housing.

The local economy

- 2.21 West Oxfordshire has a strong and resilient local economy. Economic activity rates are high at 86.2%, well above the South East average of 79.9%. Unemployment rates are low with the modelled unemployment rate being 2.6% compared to the South East average of 4.1% and are half the national average of 5.1%. In terms of qualifications, the West Oxfordshire workforce is above the national average at all levels.
- 2.22 In the pre-recession period, employment growth in West Oxfordshire was above the national average and higher than Oxfordshire as a whole. Growth was particularly strong in the financial and business services sector and in other services. Losses in manufacturing employment over this period were also comparatively small compared with what was happening nationally.
- 2.23 The most recent employment statistics suggest that in the period post-recession, employment in West Oxfordshire has recovered well. More significantly, unlike much of the country and some of its neighbouring districts, employment growth in West Oxfordshire has not just been driven by part-time and self-employment growth. West Oxfordshire has seen an increase in full-time employees of 10% in the period 2009 - 2014. Importantly however, the nature of jobs in the District is of lower value than they once were and since 2005 average workplace wages in the district have been below the regional average. It is too early to understand the implications of Brexit, but as a relatively resilient local economy, West Oxfordshire is better placed than many to deal with the economic uncertainty.

6 2011 Census

7 2011 Census

- 2.24 In terms of the make-up of the local economy, West Oxfordshire has a high proportion of employment in manufacturing, which includes a number of firms in the advanced manufacturing sectors, reflecting a strong tradition in the engineering sector. West Oxfordshire also has an above average share of employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector, reflecting a high quality of life and ability to retain consumer expenditure in cultural and leisure sectors.
- 2.25 Tourism and the visitor economy remains an important sector. Spend in 2014 from tourist activity was £280m, accounting for an estimated 3,559 jobs (full-time equivalent)⁸.
- 2.26 West Oxfordshire has a high proportion of residents who work in higher skilled occupations. In particular the proportion of managers, directors and senior officials is above both the South East and Oxfordshire average. The proportion of employees working in skilled trades is also above both regional and country average (reflecting the area's history in engineering). Generally however the occupational structure fairly closely resembles that of the South East as a whole.
- 2.27 The District is characterised by a large number of small companies with very few large businesses present. 72% of local businesses have fewer than 5 employees and 89.6% have fewer than 10. This is a more pronounced pattern than is found nationally. The majority of employment is concentrated in the south east of the District. 35% of West Oxfordshire's employment is located in Witney with a further 25% in Eynsham and Woodstock. Carterton has a relatively low proportion of the District's employment opportunities (21%) compared to the size of its workforce.
- 2.28 Rates of home working are high, with just under 8,000 or 18% of West Oxfordshire's employed residents working mainly at or from home in 2011.

Transport

- 2.29 Transport is a critically important issue for West Oxfordshire. In terms of travel patterns, the District demonstrates a reasonable level of self-containment, with 65% of residents in employment either commuting within the District, working at home or having no fixed place of work and 35% commuting out of the District to work elsewhere⁹. Almost 12,000 people commute into the District each day and 20,000 commute out, meaning a net outflow of around 8,000, just under 15% of the District's resident workforce. This represents a slight increase since 2001. There is a particularly high net outflow of workers in the education, health and professional scientific and technical sectors.
- 2.30 The majority of out-commuters (7,500) travel to Oxford City, with most travelling by car. This places significant pressure on the road network with severe traffic congestion on the A40 to Oxford being a daily occurrence. The problems associated with the A40 also have wider impacts as drivers choose to take alternate routes leading to congestion elsewhere including the A4095, A415 and A44 as well as minor roads including the B4449 which suffer because of narrow, historic crossing points across the River Thames. Congestion also occurs within some towns with air quality management areas having been designated at Witney and Chipping Norton.
- 2.31 Public transport provision in West Oxfordshire is variable in terms of coverage and frequency. There are two main rail lines, the Cherwell Valley Line and the Cotswold Line. A very small proportion of the Cherwell Valley Line runs through the eastern part of the District with a station at Tackley providing services northwards to Birmingham and southwards to Oxford and onto London Paddington.

⁸ Economic Impact of Tourism on Oxfordshire 2014", published August 2015

⁹ 2011 Census

- 2.32 The Cotswold Line passes through the largely rural central part of the District, connecting several small towns and villages with Hereford in the west and Oxford and London in the east. Notably, neither of the District's two rail lines serve the three main towns. The new Oxford Parkway Station located nearby in Cherwell District opened in October 2015 thereby offering additional journey choice to West Oxfordshire residents.
- 2.33 In terms of bus provision, Witney and Carterton, the two largest settlements, are connected to Oxford by high frequency services. The Woodstock area is also well served by public transport. Other bus services operate throughout the rural area with varying frequencies. In July 2016 Oxfordshire County Council announced that subsidies would be withdrawn for a large number of bus services operating in West Oxfordshire leaving some settlements with very few or no bus services at all, although some services have continued on a commercial basis.
- 2.34 Most cycle and pedestrian routes are focused on the main towns although there are dedicated cycle routes between Witney, Eynsham and Oxford along the A40 and from Woodstock to Oxford along the A44.

Leisure and recreation

- 2.35 The District offers various leisure and recreation opportunities. The three main towns each have leisure centres although the Witney and Carterton facilities are in need of enhancement and expansion respectively. There are also other known requirements in some parts of the District such as for additional playing pitches and allotments.
- 2.36 The rural nature of the District lends itself to walking, cycling and other leisurely pursuits and in the south of the District water-based opportunities are presented by the River Thames and the various lakes created as a result of sand and gravel extraction in the Lower Windrush Valley.

Health and well-being

- 2.37 Primary and secondary health care in West Oxfordshire is provided by a network of 16 local GP practices and two hospitals, the Witney Community Hospital and the War Memorial Community Hospital in Chipping Norton.
- 2.38 Generally speaking, the health of people in West Oxfordshire is better than the England average with life expectancy around one year longer, for both men (1.5yr) and women (0.8yr). However, there is still room for improvement in some areas including obesity.
- 2.39 Deprivation is lower than average, however the dispersed nature of the District means that despite a general level of affluence, some areas are classed as being within the most deprived in the country in terms of access to housing and services. This is of particular relevance for those living in relative poverty and in West Oxfordshire the majority of people claiming pension credit live in rural areas.
- 2.40 In terms of child health, rates of obesity (Year 6) are significantly better than the average for England and the rate of alcohol specific hospital stays among those under 18 was better than the average for England.
- 2.41 In terms of adult health, in 2015 just under 20% of adults were classified as obese. The rate of alcohol related harm hospital stays was significantly better than the average for England as was the rate of smoking related deaths. Estimated levels of adult smoking and physical activity are also better than the England average. The rate of people killed and seriously injured on roads is however worse than average as is the rate of new cases of malignant melanoma and these have both been worse than average since 2012. The Council recognises the need to work with Oxfordshire County Council in order to understand and address the relatively high rate of fatalities and serious injuries on the District's road network. Rates of sexually transmitted infections and TB, statutory homelessness, violent crime, long term unemployment, drug misuse and early deaths from cardiovascular diseases are all better than average.

2.42 Priorities in West Oxfordshire are to reduce obesity in children and adults, increase physical activity and improve access to screening programmes.

Education

2.43 West Oxfordshire has a network of 47 primary schools, 2 infant schools, 1 nursery school, one special school and 7 secondary schools. In terms of educational achievement, the rate of children obtaining 5 or more GCSEs (Grades A*- C including English and Maths) is significantly higher than the England average.

2.44 Importantly, throughout much of the District primary schools are either already under pressure or are forecast to fill as pupil numbers increase. There is more flexibility at secondary level although the proposed level of growth at Witney will necessitate the provision of a new secondary facility within the town with various potential options currently being explored. There will also need to be an expansion of secondary capacity in the Eynsham area to support the proposed Garden Village and other growth in the area.

2.45 In terms of further education, Abingdon and Witney College offers part time and full time further and higher education courses and also works with secondary schools offering part time courses for 14-16 year olds. The college has recently redeveloped part of its site to provide enhanced facilities and has further plans for improvement.

Natural environment

2.46 The District has a rich natural environment with around 34% of the area falling within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Land on the eastern edge of the District falls within the Oxford Green Belt and at Cassington Meadows there is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) of European importance. There are also a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) areas of Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Sites. There is however an acknowledged need to further enhance and extend habitats

to develop networks and a series of Conservation Target Areas has been identified where the restoration and enhancement of habitats would have the greatest benefit.

2.47 There are several rivers flowing through West Oxfordshire which are important corridors for biodiversity, provide opportunities for recreation and form part of the setting of many towns and villages. However they also present a flood risk, with severe flooding events affecting many communities in 2007.

2.48 West Oxfordshire contains some extensive sand and gravel and limestone resources particularly in the southern half of the District, focused on the Lower Windrush Valley which has seen extensive mineral extraction for a number of years. The District Council continues to engage with the County Council as mineral planning authority in relation to the overall strategy for future sand and gravel extraction in the County as guided by the Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

2.49 The after-use of mineral sites presents the opportunity for leisure and tourism uses as well as creating opportunities for nature reserves but it is vital that mineral extraction is properly managed in order to protect environmental quality and public amenity and to help ameliorate flood risk.

Historic environment

2.50 The District has a rich and varied historic environment which contributes greatly to the distinctive character and identity of the area, to its tourism, cultural and social role, to economic prosperity and to the quality of life for those living here. The District has 3,200 listed buildings, 149 scheduled monuments, 51 conservation areas and 16 registered historic parks and gardens of special historic interest. Blenheim Palace at Woodstock has been designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS) and is a major asset to the District and key visitor attraction.

Key issues and challenges - summary

2.51 Drawing on this brief profile of the District and other background information, we can identify a number of key issues and challenges to be addressed through the Local Plan. These are set out below in the form of a SWOC analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central, accessible location • High quality environment – landscape, built heritage and biodiversity • Strong sense of place • Generally good place to live with a high quality of life • Strong and articulate community groups • Generally vibrant town centres, particularly Witney • Strong and diverse local economy including many small businesses, specialisms in high-tech manufacturing and engineering plus RAF Brize Norton • Relatively skilled workforce with no major skills gaps although perhaps lacking in some technical skills • High rates of economic activity and low unemployment • No significant areas of dereliction • Oxfordshire Cotswolds - important tourism sector with nationally important attractions • Blenheim World Heritage site • Good variety of formal and informal leisure opportunities • High levels of owner-occupation • Reasonable level of self-containment (about 65%) • Two railway lines and inter-urban bus routes • Reasonably well-balanced population in terms of different age groups • A generally healthy population • Extensive sand and gravel resources provide a local source of construction aggregate to support future growth • High rates of home working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-commuting and reliance on the private car and rural road network • Severe traffic congestion in Witney and on Oxford approach roads, particularly A40 east of Witney • Air quality problems within Witney and Chipping Norton • Limited public transport in more rural areas • Districts three main towns are not directly served by rail • Lack of direct access from the primary road network to Carterton • Imbalance between jobs and homes in Carterton with a consequent high level of commuting • Limited opportunities for safe travel by foot or cycle outside main towns such as where routes are adjacent to roads • Disturbance from activity at RAF Brize Norton • House prices higher than the national average and very high in some areas • A predominance of larger properties exacerbates problems of housing affordability • Some rural areas have poor access to services and facilities plus trend for loss/closure of rural services • Limited access to high speed broadband • Small pockets of rural poverty with lower wages for workers in West Oxon compared to those travelling to work elsewhere • Generally limited or no spare capacity in existing primary schools • Many areas and communities affected by flooding, particular in the south of the District • Only just above average rates of educational attainment • Very few large multi-national companies • Some older employment areas in need of investment/redevelopment

Opportunities

- Address traffic congestion on the A40 between Witney and Oxford
- Raising design standards across the District
- New development to help secure increased affordable housing provision as well as new and improved supporting infrastructure, including green infrastructure
- To attract additional inward investment and achieve a more self-contained local economy
- Further investment at RAF Brize Norton
- Regenerating areas of MOD housing in Carterton
- Capitalising on and contributing to the Oxfordshire high tech and knowledge economy including the provision of a new 'science park' north of the A40 near Eynsham
- Improvements in internet and mobile phone technology
- New sustainable construction methods and renewable energy schemes
- Investment in town centres
- Biodiversity Conservation Target Areas
- Biomass and woodland management
- Sustainable drainage schemes to reduce flood risk
- Further enhance and expand habitats and networks
- Provision of new green infrastructure through after-use of mineral working
- Improvements in public transport, walking and cycling facilities to help reduce the use of the private car
- Provision of primary road connection between Carterton/RAF Brize Norton and the A40
- Provision of major road infrastructure improvements to facilitate future growth
- Further develop the District's tourism offer
- Further develop the role of the Thames for leisure and recreation
- To further increase levels of home working to reduce the need to travel
- To increase opportunities for those wishing to self-build their own home
- Increased access to, understanding and enhancement of the historic environment

Challenges

- Housing affordability
- The delivery of historically high, for West Oxfordshire, housing targets given the local track record of the development industry
- A relatively 'tight' labour market (ie. employers must compete for employees)
- An ageing population
- Meeting the needs of local communities with access to services and facilities whilst maintaining West Oxfordshire's high environmental quality
- Provision of a mix of different housing types to meet the needs of different groups including young people, families, older people and those wishing to self-build
- Reduction in our higher than average carbon footprint
- Reducing dependence upon travel by private car including long distance travel to main urban centres including London
- Pressures from economic growth centres close to West Oxfordshire including the Oxfordshire 'knowledge spine'
- Helping meet Oxford City's unmet housing needs
- Climate change – extreme weather events
- Flood risk
- Water scarcity
- Use of Greenfield land to meet development needs
- Satisfactorily accommodating and benefitting from the expansion of RAF Brize Norton
- Modernisation of older employment stock
- Supporting the agricultural sector and diversification of the rural economy
- Mitigating the impacts of sand and gravel extraction
- Roll out of superfast broadband in rural areas
- Increasing physical activity
- Improving rates of educational achievement
- A number of designated heritage assets considered to be at risk

