



Our Open Thought Submission

A strategy for Oxfordshire
that shifts emphasis
to creating viable and
revitalised rural communities
and eases pressure on
urban centres



“We are the first generation to know we are destroying the planet and the last one that can do anything about it.”

*Tanya Steele
Chief Executive of the World Wildlife Fund*

Introduction

This Open Thought submission is made at a time when the world is emerging from the COVID 19 pandemic. Together we are reflecting on what we have learnt and how that learning might be taken forward into how we live and work, how we will connect and how we relate to our environment and nature.

In stating our purpose and our ten goals so clearly in 2017, followed by our land strategy in 2019 and our response to the climate emergency this year we cannot be any clearer when we say there is a need to do things differently in order to achieve the shifts necessary to protect the environment and secure our own health and well-being.

As a landed Estate, a holder of local property and a large employer we are deeply rooted to the area and recognise our responsibility to those who live and work in and around Blenheim today but also to those who follow us in future generations.

Through this submission we positively challenge the way in which planning and development of the countryside and its associated towns and villages has traditionally been approached – the burden can no longer fall to Market Towns alone – and the Oxfordshire 2050 plan is a time to do things a bit differently.

We believe the themes we bring forward here for how ‘Villages in a Garden’ can be delivered not just to those living and working around Blenheim but across the county form a key part of a sustainable future for rural Oxfordshire.

Introduction

Our strategy is holistic in its approach and will enable us to deliver on our pledge to secure a carbon positive future by 2027.

The successful delivery of these principles into our day-to-day lives cannot be secured in isolation. It will require evidence, collaboration with our existing communities and support from local authority partners.

To hand on a version of today without addressing some of the major challenges of living and working, connectivity and climate change is to evade our responsibility to Oxfordshire, and with this we look forward to bringing this exciting submission to life.



Roy Cox
Estates Director





“In developing our Strategy we have collaborated with some of the country’s leading experts and we believe we will be in a position through its implementation to be a leader and exemplar for others to follow.”

Context

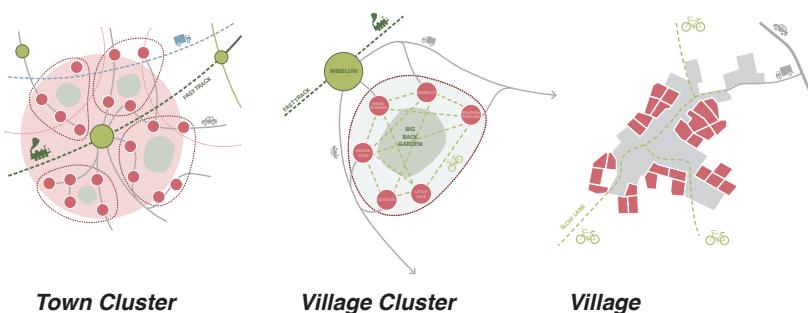
A place-based vision

Over the last year we have been working with VeloCity, a multi-disciplinary team of architects, planners, engineers and placemakers to help us develop some of the spatial aspects of our Land Strategy.

The VeloCity team won an international placemaking competition which was sponsored by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to come up with innovative ideas to find more sustainable ways to plan and develop the region between Oxford and Cambridge.

A large part of the Corridor is made up of countryside and smaller villages and towns and the team decided to take a fresh approach to the future planning of our rural communities. The final submission comprised a spatial proposition that involved a holistic and layered approach to reinvigorating clusters of rural villages and their communities, supported by great walking and cycling links between them, as well as to nearby bus and rail interchanges.

We were intrigued by the VeloCity proposition and felt that some of their ideas and initiatives could be translated and developed further in Oxfordshire.



Context

VeloCity Principles

People over cars

Creating more sustainable movement networks

Compact not sprawl

Keeping the special character of our villages

Connected not isolated

Linking villages with shared resources to benefit all

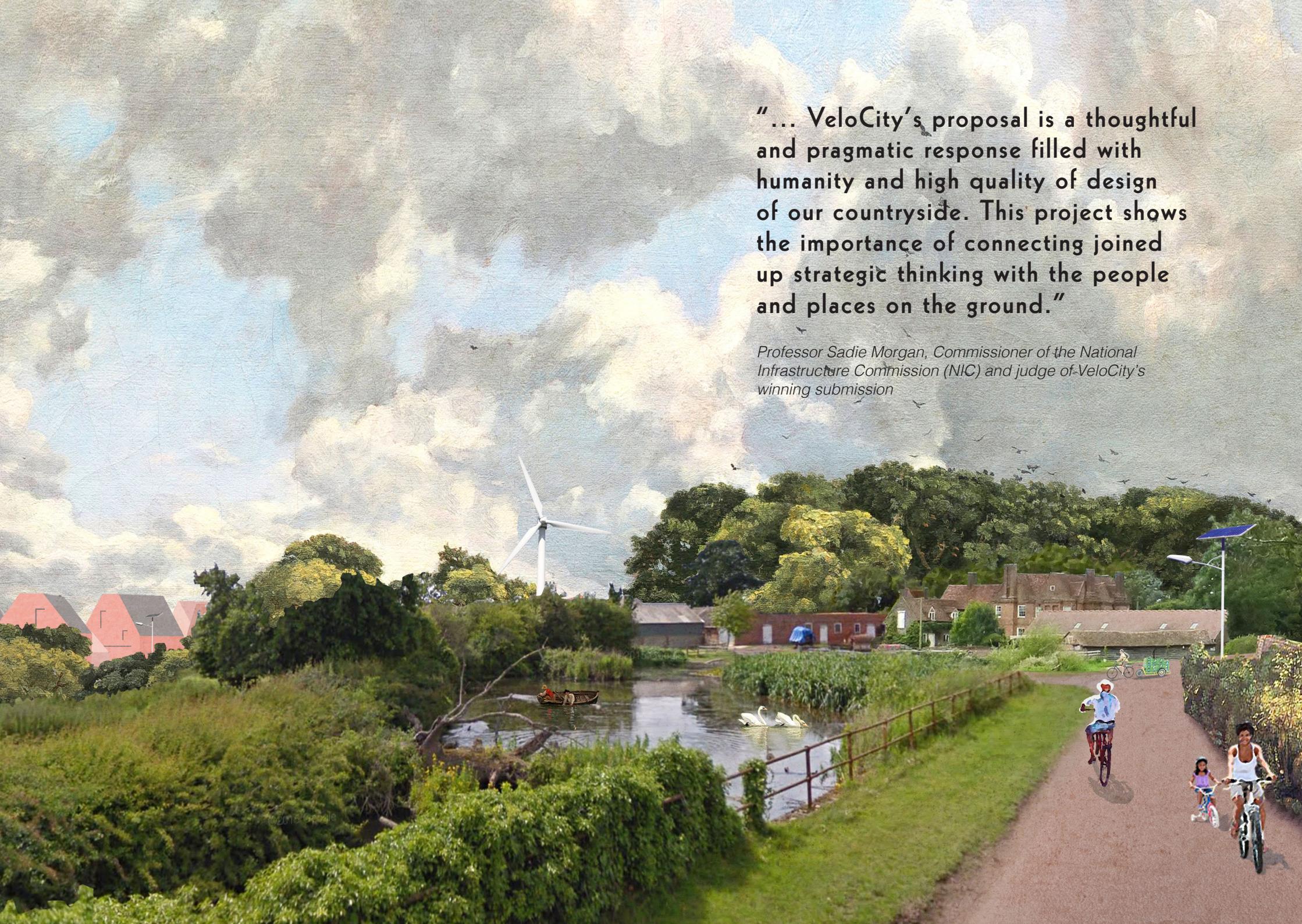
Opportunity over decline

Releasing land for new places to live and work

Resilient not fragile

Promoting sustainable environments, health and well-being





“... VeloCity’s proposal is a thoughtful and pragmatic response filled with humanity and high quality of design of our countryside. This project shows the importance of connecting joined up strategic thinking with the people and places on the ground.”

Professor Sadie Morgan, Commissioner of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and judge of VeloCity’s winning submission

Context

VeloCity vision applied to the Oxfordshire context

Oxfordshire forms a significant part of the Ox-Cam Corridor and local authorities have been wrestling with many of the issues that were tackled by VeloCity in the Ox-Cam ideas competition. In addition the landscape shares a number of similarities in terms of topography, morphology and settlement pattern, namely clusters of villages connected by a network of small rural roads.

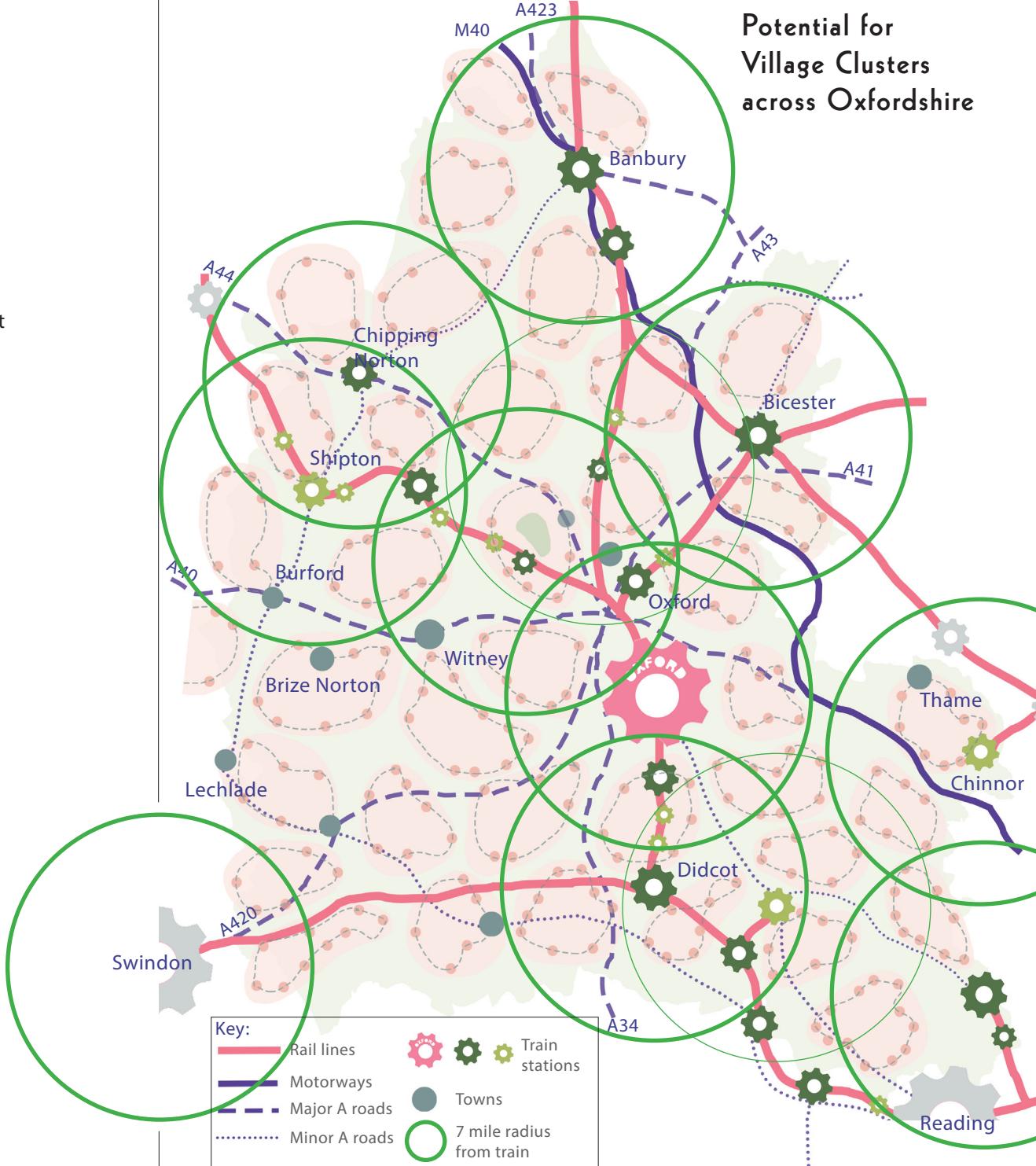
Rail lines pass through the area and each village cluster is within 7 miles from a station.

Movement by car is the principle means of transport and the approach to planning in these areas has been to constrain and limit their development and growth because they are seen as being unsustainable locations.

The result of such constraints has led to issues including aging populations, rising house prices and a lack of affordable housing, school closures, loss of amenities, congestion and a road network that is at or is already over capacity, is not designed to support cars, cyclists and pedestrians safely.

Through more proactive and holistic plan making we believe there is an opportunity to tackle these issues.

The rural areas of Oxfordshire share a number of similarities to those studied by VeloCity in the Ox-Cam Corridor, namely clusters of villages connected by a network of small rural roads...



Context

Delivering an exemplar at Blenheim

Through our joint working with VeloCity we have started to develop a spatial strategy aimed at enriching village life and sense of place, while creating a wide range of new homes and working environments in healthy and socially cohesive places.

In summary:

The strategy comprises a 'polycentric' cluster of new and 'expanded' villages, connected to one another by a fine-grained network of safe cycle only or cycle priority routes and within cycling distance of new/existing rail stations/ public transport interchanges.

Each cluster is supported by the necessary social, environmental and economic infrastructure to enable them to operate in a sustainable manner and within its environmental limits.

Cycling/ walking as the mainstream form of movement shapes the way places are planned and the way people communicate and relate to one another, enabling the development of resilient, intergenerational communities and the establishment of a strong character and identity.

Adoption of new technologies and orientation of buildings allows us to deliver on our carbon ambitions.

Enhanced access into the countryside and the diversification of the agriculture allows a wider range of functions in terms of

meeting the food, leisure and recreational needs of the communities that live in and around the landscape.

Delivery of the strategy will take a number of years to implement. Commitment to such a long term and sustained growth strategy, however, creates certainty and allows us to invest in local supply chains, in employment training and skills development, and to build capacity and trust within our local communities.

We are calling our strategy: **Villages in a Garden**

Having introduced the concept we now go onto to describe its component parts and how we propose to move it forward to reality.

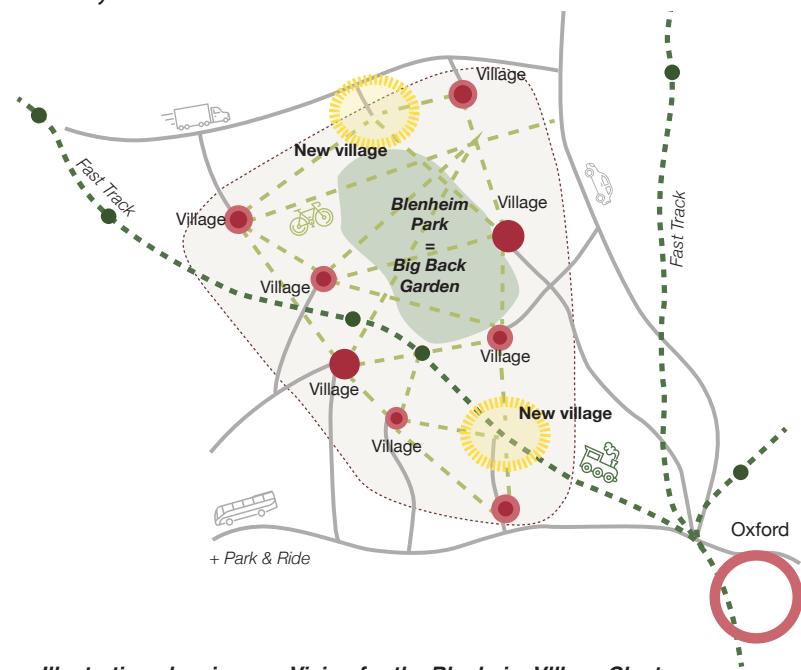


Illustration showing our Vision for the Blenheim Village Cluster



2050 Future Blenheim Village Cluster

“Our vision pushes the boundaries and fully explores the potential to shift behaviours and deliver an exemplary approach to development and create a legacy of which everyone can be proud.”

The Vision

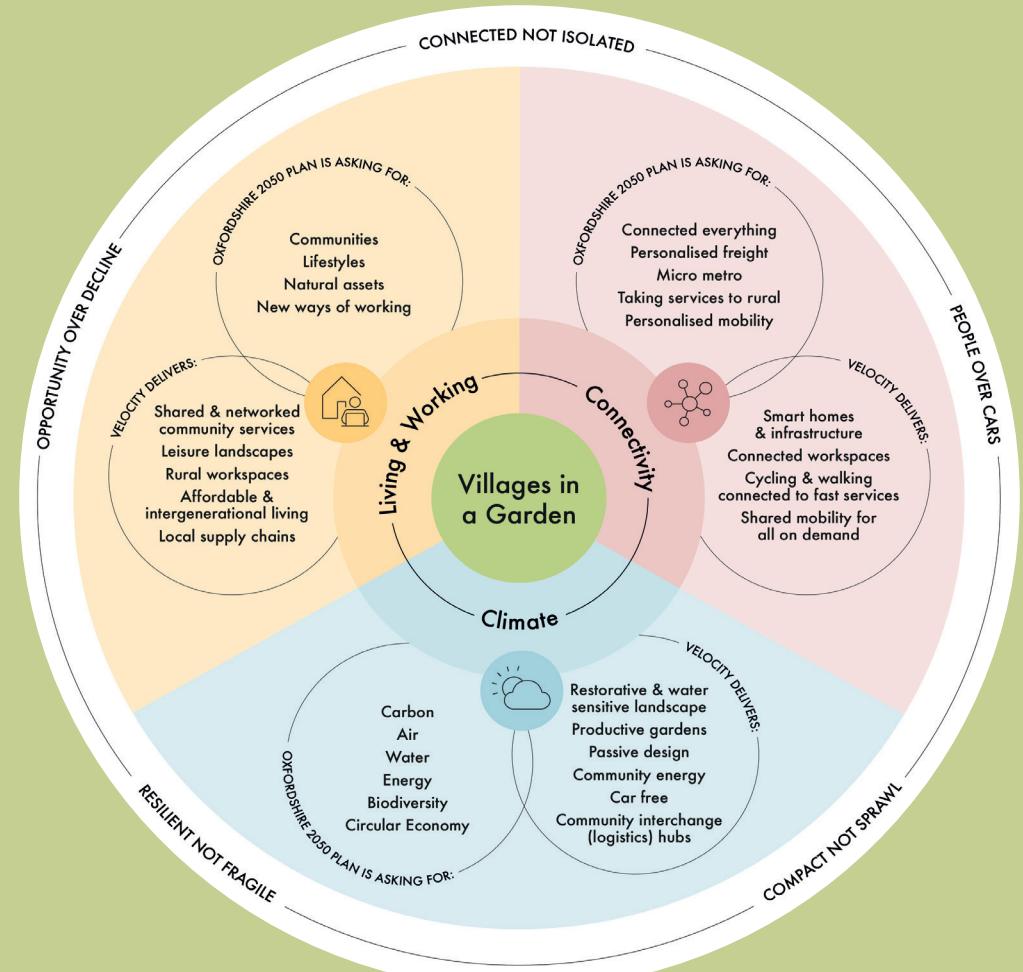
Villages in a Garden - the strategy explained

Our spatial strategy focusses on the land and villages that comprise the Blenheim Estate and other villages that are within an eight kilometre or 30 minute cycle ride from the Estate.

Our approach is multi-layered and underpinned by a series of linked initiatives and actions all of which can be grouped under the three Open Thought themes: Living & Working, Connectivity and Climate.

In essence we believe that delivery of positive social, economic and environmental outcomes will require us to think big, to think holistically and we will need spatial strategies that puts future development in the right place, serviced by the fit for purpose infrastructure to enable it and the people who live and work there to operate in a sustainable manner, which at the same time eases the pressure on existing overstretched infrastructure and which allows us to protect and enhance the landscape.

The component part of our proposed strategy and how it sits alongside the Open Thought themes is summarised by the diagram opposite.



Strategy Themes

Connectivity

Connecting everything
Mobility interchanges
Personalised freight
Future transport

Strategy Themes

Connectivity

Strategy objectives

- To provide a realistic alternative to movement, other than by car, particularly last mile journeys.
- To encourage people to choose to move by modes other than the car.
- To reduce traffic movements, particularly HGV movements into and through the area.
- To ease traffic congestion and improve air quality.
- To improve safety on rural roads for pedestrian and cyclist.
- To reduce the impact of the car on the future planning of our places.

Our response

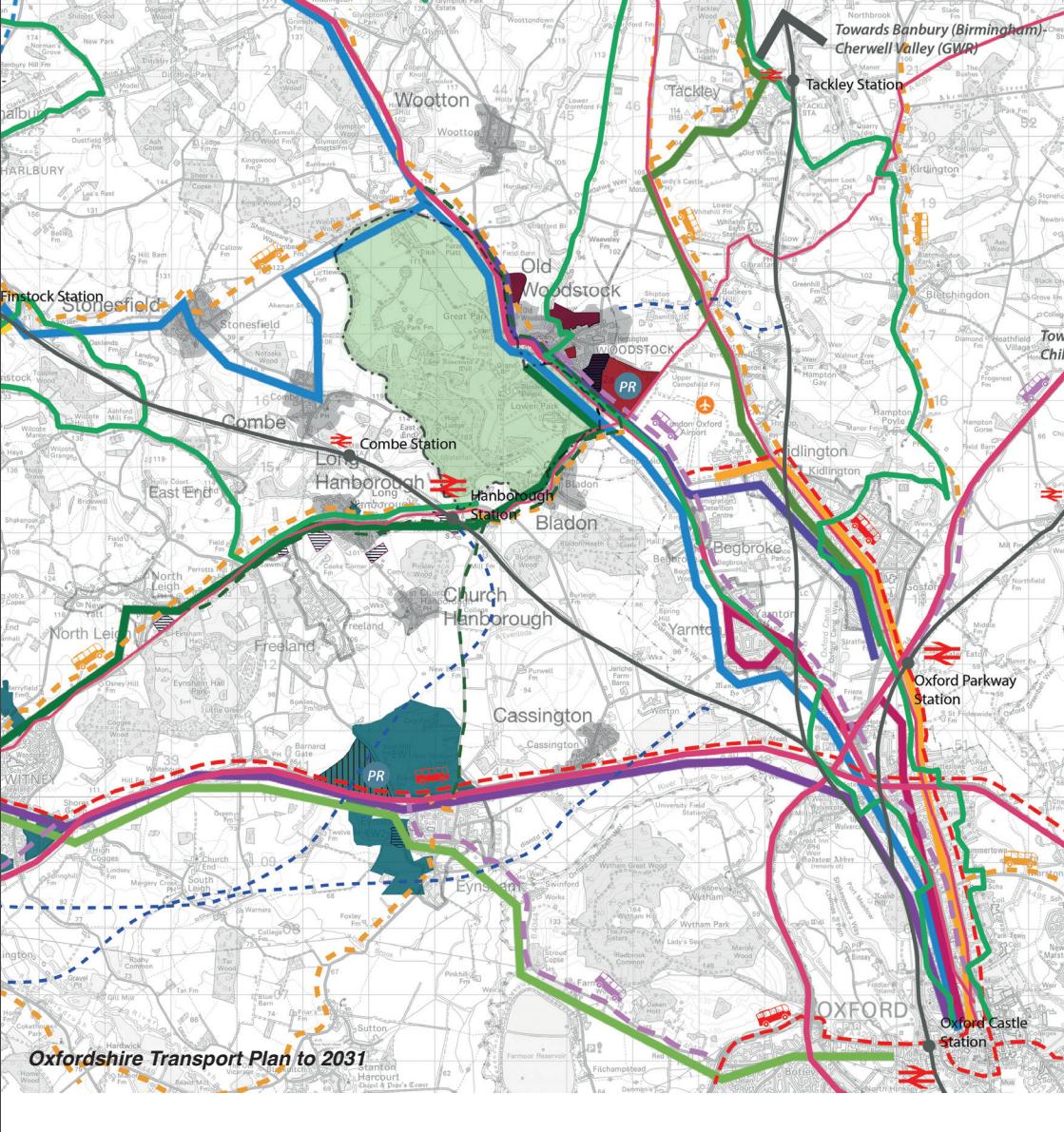
- Implementation of a network of new and upgraded cycle/ pedestrian routes using existing

PROWS, footpaths, bridleways, segregated routes and marked routes, which link each village, transport hubs, employment locations and longer distance/ national cycle network.

- Gradual re-prioritisation of traffic, traffic re-assignment and road closures such that HGV traffic and through traffic is reduced within the Village Cluster and movements by bike/ walking/ electric vehicle are prioritised.
- Introduction of a maximum 20mph speed limits, quiet zones and re-prioritisation of existing routes across the Village Cluster.
- A local 'bus/ taxi' service that connects each village, train stations and the park and rides.

Key:

- Land allocated for housing in West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031
- Developments brought forward by Blenheim Estates
- Land allocated for employment in West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031
- Schemes with planning permission



Strategy Themes

Connectivity

- Provision 'Community Infrastructure Hubs' in each village, train stations and park and rides which act as places for pick up, drop -off and collection of goods and waste.
- Promotion of measures that encourage home delivery from local food producers.
- Implementation of local delivery service from 'hub to home/ shop' via electric vehicle/ cargo bikes
- Provision of new and the regeneration of existing facilities that deliver the everyday goods and services people need.
- Introduction of local village 'work places' providing centralised facilities and an alternative to working from home.
- Introduction of a bike/ e-bike hire scheme, which includes electric bikes.
- Provision of high quality bike parking at park and ride and stations.

- Introduction of a series of measures to encourage all employers and schools to promote cycling and walking.
- Promotion of new development that actively discourages car ownership.
- All new housing to be car free.
- Introduction of village car hire/ car share schemes.
- Generous and secure bike storage within the home.
- Introduction of electric vehicle recharging points.
- Adoption of place specific smart technology in terms of waste collection, deliveries and use of public transport.
- Increase in population within the Cluster to enable the initiatives to be sustained.

Self-powered mobility - the alternative to the car



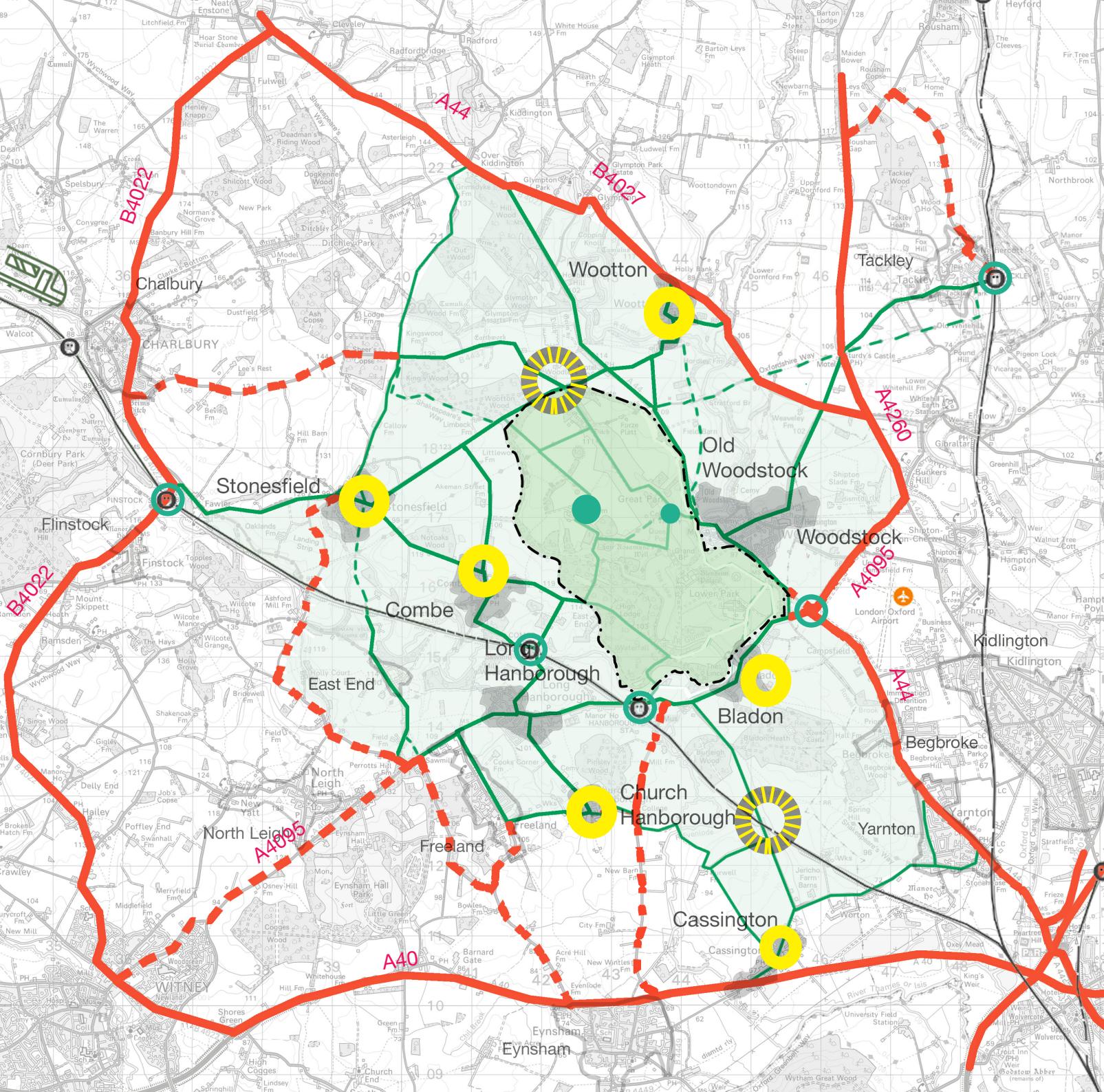
Strategy Themes

Connectivity

2050 a Future Village Cluster with priority to people over cars

Key:

- New village (approx. location)
- Expanded village with interchange hub
- Community hub
- Interchange hub
- Cycle/pedestrian route or priority with car reduction
- Alternative cycle/pedestrian route
- 20mph/ local traffic routes
- Main roads around village cluster
- Feeder road - 30mph with segregated cycle routes



Strategy Themes



Daily commute

Man aged 40 works in Oxford
Journey: Woodstock - Hanborough station
Route types: Estate cycle path and segregated road
Mode transport: Electric fold-up bike & train

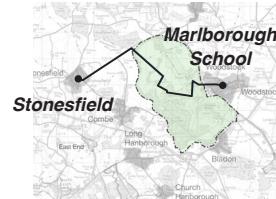
12 min Drive time
at peak time

9 min Electric bike
@ 18 mph
13.5 min Cycle
@ 12 mph



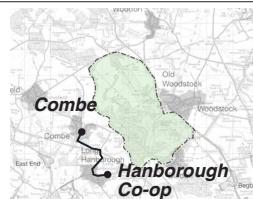
School run

Teenager living in Stonesfield
Journey: Stonesfield - Marlborough School, Woodstock
Route types: Estate cycle path & segregated road
Mode transport: Electric fold-up bike



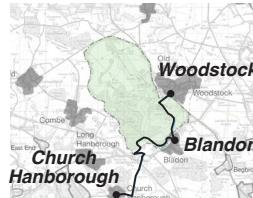
Weekly shop

Woman aged 62
Journey: Combe - Hanborough Co-op
Mode transport: Electric cargo bike or mobility vehicle
Route types: Dedicated cycle road



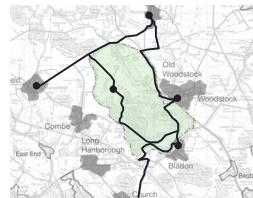
Commute with school drop off

Father and doctor lives in Church Hanborough, works in Woodstock
Journey: Church Hanborough - Bladon Primary school - Woodstock Surgery
Route types: Lower Rd segregated cycle route, estate cycle path & road
Mode transport: Electric cargo bike



Family weekend

Local family living in Stonesfield. Journey: Stonesfield - visit to Park Farm community event - lunch in Woodstock - visit Granny in Wootton - then Home
Route types: Estate cycle path, bridleway/cycle routes and segregated road
Mode transport: Electric bicycles & cargo bikes



Kids school bus

Primary school children age 4-7
Journey: Old Woodstock to - Wootton
Mode transport: Cycle bus
Route type: Upgraded bridleway



Strategy Themes

Living & Working



Sustainable Communities
Sustainable Living
New Ways of working
Strengthening natural assets

Strategy Themes

Character and place: a village cluster



Cottage vernacular



Water Pump in Combebi



Wootton Community shop



Village bench

Strategy Themes

Living & Working

Strategy objectives

- To introduce new high quality development that builds on the character and qualities of the existing villages and to create new sustainable villages.
- To deliver the support infrastructure that the existing communities living and working in the Village Cluster require and to help self-containment and self-sufficiency.
- To deliver to zero-carbon standards through our building, provision of area wide renewable energy provision and use of technology.
- Building Lifetime Neighbourhoods and providing a range of house types suitable for families, the elderly, young people and single people.
- To deliver a mix of tenures, including affordable housing to buy and to rent.
- To enhance the potential of the landscape to meet the leisure, sport, well-being, natural and ecological needs of communities and to allow for more localised food production.
- To enhance community involvement and participation in decision making and delivery.
- To enhance local supply chains and put in place long term training initiatives.

Our response

- Comprehensive and long term planning of the Village Cluster, which will identify the potential to increase the size of each existing village and create two new villages.

All traditional villages are different and have distinct characters that we want to respect and preserve.

Strategy Themes

Living & Working

- The adoption of compact building forms and gentle densification that respects and builds on the traditional village character and which places emphasis on movement by people rather than the car.
- Preparation and adoption of village design codes to plan for the cohesive and phased build out of new development over time.
- All housing and other buildings should be built to passivhaus standards or equivalent.
- Provision of car free housing and putting in place measures to reduce the impact of parking in existing villages..
- Direct implementation of new

- development and enhancement of existing by Blenheim and the putting in place of long term local supply chains and local training initiatives.
- Each village to be provided with hubs which will act as collection/ distribution points, village shop, bike storage/ bike hire/ bike repair, co-working space, storage space, community use, health/ teaching space and recycling space.
- Putting in place structures to enable consultation, participation and local decision making.
- Introduction of superfast broadband and support for initiatives that encourage rural business and working.

Lightfooted buildings and gentle densification will keep villages compact and walkable.

Typical housing development



40% Roads + Parking

10% Pavement

27% Private Gardens

23% Building Footprint

Our alternative vision



7% Road
5% Parking
3% Pavement
14% Community Courtyard

11% Ecological Buffer
12% Community Green Space

29% Private Gardens
11% Building Footprint

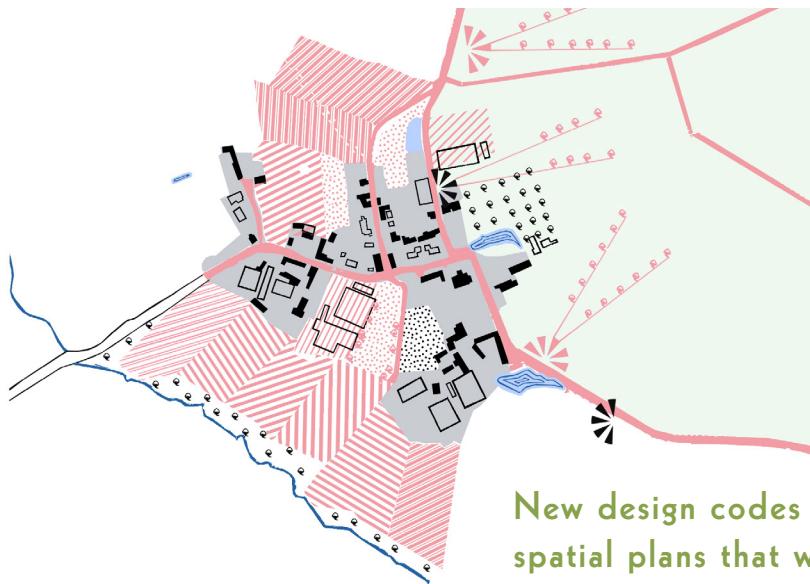
The proportion of space given to open space and community spaces used by people is frighteningly low in a typical housing development.

With more compact housing and attention to the spaces inbetween we think the alternative is a landscape-led approach which gives less primacy to the car and creates a more light-footed development with meaningful green space for people and the planet.

Strategy Themes

Living & Working

'Always Building Belonging' - creating spatial plans and housing typologies that are characterful and "of this place"



New design codes and spatial plans that works with the village grain

Existing: Preserve & Enhance



Landmark buildings retained



Existing buildings re-used



Big Back Garden



Existing routes used as cycle paths



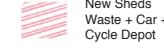
Existing Common Land + Village Green



Existing Trees + Woodland



Existing Streams + Ponds



Existing Key Views



New Housing (Background)



New Housing (Foreground)



Community + Work Space (re-use & new)



New Sheds Waste + Car + Cycle Depot



New Common Land + Village Green



New Trees + Woodland



New Streams + Ponds



New Key Views

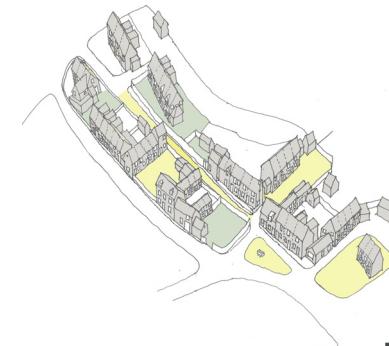
New housing inspired by existing typologies in the study area



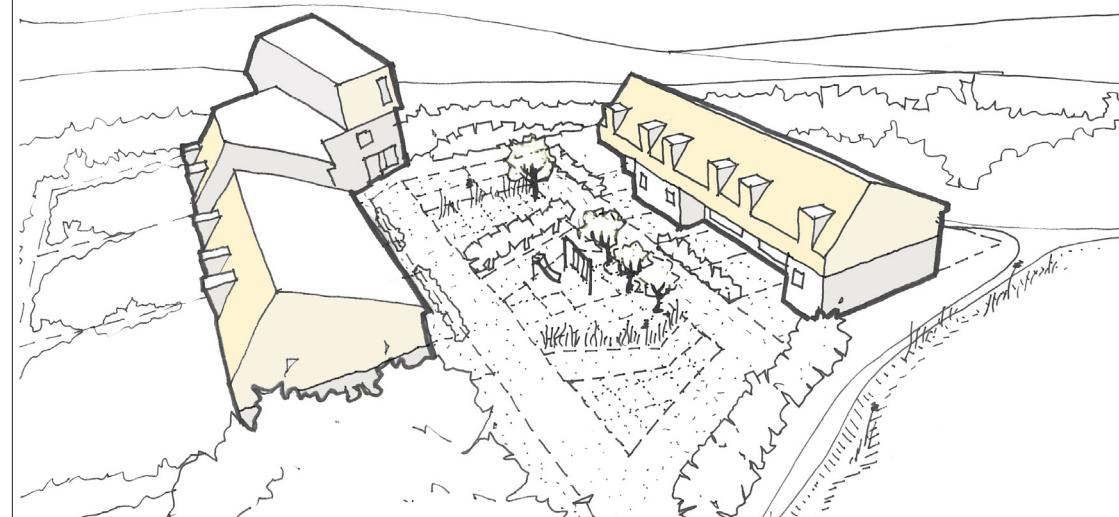
Typical Blenheim terrace cottages

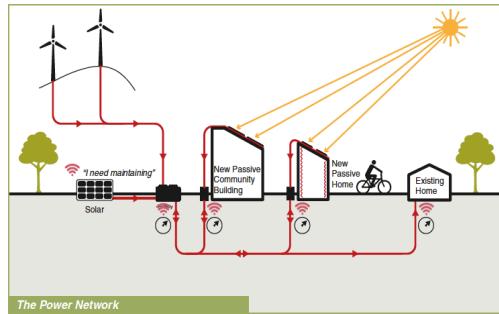


Typical Blenheim farm courtyard



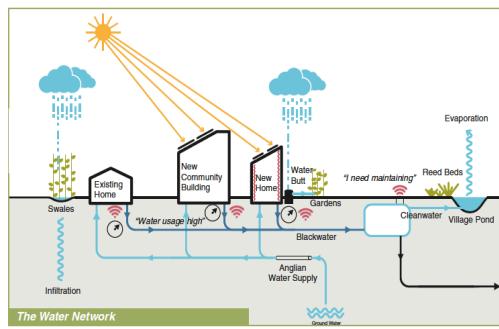
Proposed housing clusters to Passivhaus standards



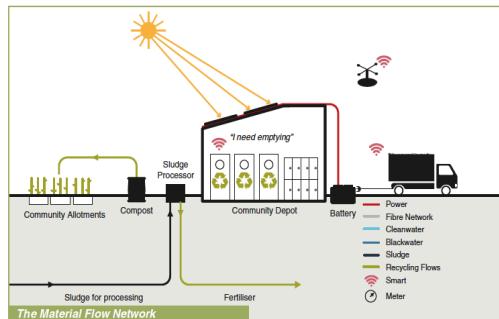
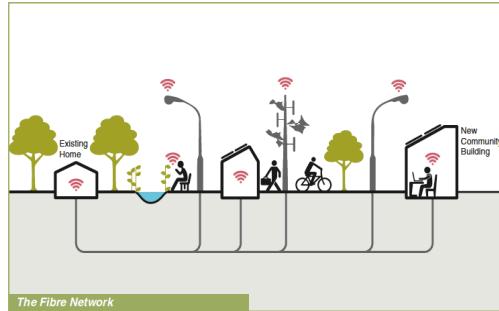


Strategy Themes

Climate



Carbon
Air
Water
Biodiversity



Climate

Strategy Objectives

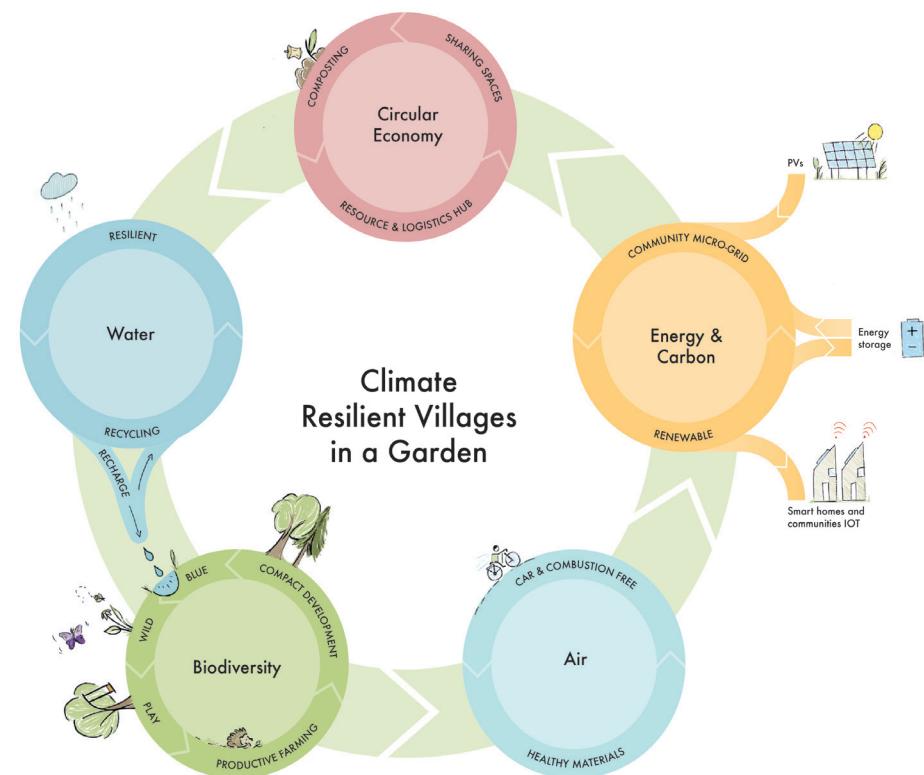
- To enable our rural communities to meet the Government's zero carbon target and embrace the principles of a circular economy.
- To restore habitats and create climate resilient rural communities.

Our response

- Investment in renewable energy systems, integrated with the landscape and habitat creation, with benefits directly given to the community.
- Treating wastewater flows locally and adoption of surface water managed through sustainable drainage systems, expressed in the landscape in order to reduce flood risk, encourage biodiversity and contribute to the character of each village.
- More sustainable management of existing

Carbon negative agriculture that adopts a natural capital approach to landscape management

Compact development which gives back what it takes to deliver biodiversity gain.



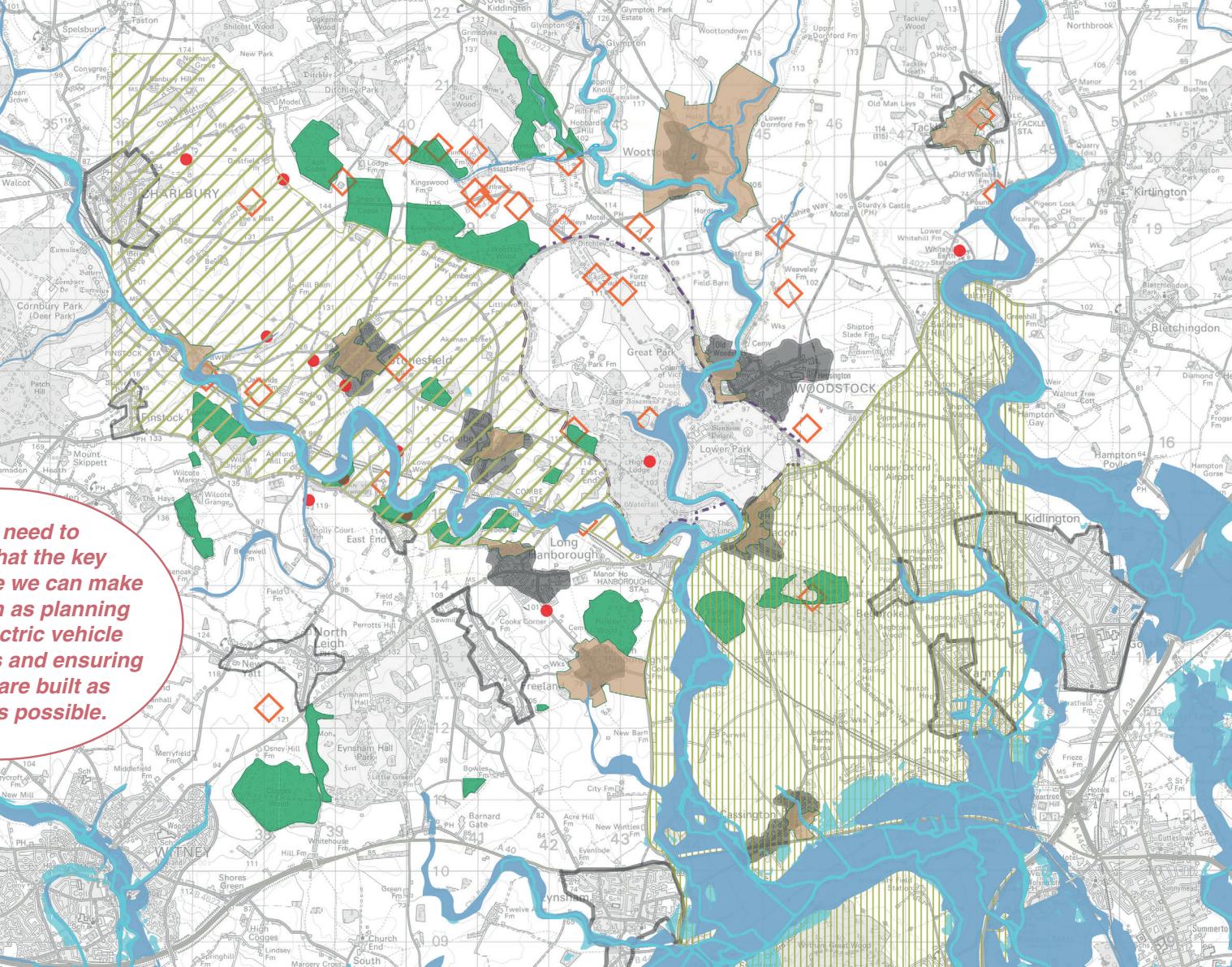
Place: our understanding

Climate

Blenheim Estate has set a target to become a net generator of green energy by 2027

We need to show ambition and impetus to push the climate change agenda forward...

...and we need to establish what the key areas are where we can make a change such as planning provision, electric vehicle charging points and ensuring new homes are built as efficiently as possible.



Key:

	Oxford Green Belt		Ancient Woodland		Flood Risk zone		SSSI
	Conservation area		Cotswold AONB		Ancient Monument		World Heritage site

Making it happen

The initiative which we are calling Villages in a Garden, is a dispersed development strategy that aligns with the Open Thought aspirations and can be applied county wide.

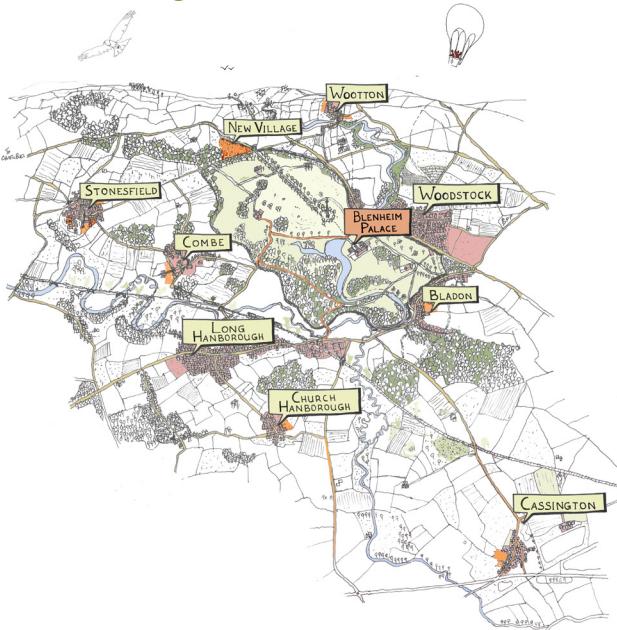
With your support there is an opportunity for the Blenheim cluster to lead the way as a pilot scheme.

The Blenheim cluster

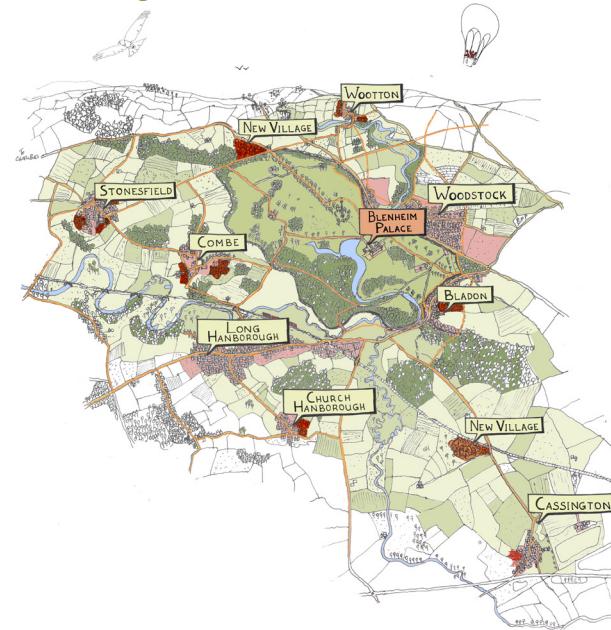
Having identified the opportunities, we have sketched out how this could be developed in the short, medium and long term.

Delivery will be led by Blenheim Estate as landowner, developer and long term steward of the land, however it will depend on the multiplicity of partners and the communities living and working in the area – now and in the future.

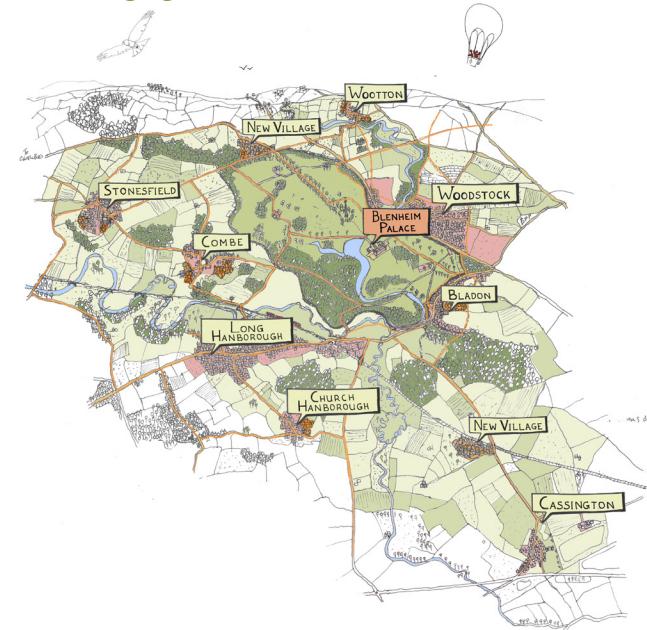
0-2 years Building the foundation



0-10 years Enabling transition



10-20 years Shifting gear



Next steps

Using feedback to this vision, our next step will be to develop a spatial strategy working with existing communities and key stakeholders.

Our vision is a blueprint that could be applied not just to Oxfordshire but to many villages across the UK and we invite communities, landowners, councils and stakeholders to help us take forward the vision.

VeloCity team

Left to right

Sarah Featherstone Featherstone Young
Kay Hughes Khaa
Annalie Riches Mikhail Riches
Petra Marko Marko & Placemakers
Jennifer Ross Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design
Judith Sykes Expedition Engineering



VeloCity story

VeloCity is the winning proposal for National Infrastructure Commission's placemaking ideas competition, which sought inspirational visions for the future of development within the arc encompassing Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Oxford, one of the UK's fastest-growing and most productive regions.

VeloCity was devised by an expert team of placemakers, informing the National Infrastructure Commission's report *Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc*, published in November 2017.

The team have spoken widely about VeloCity vision to government, local authorities, communities and landowners.

The VeloCity vision has received awards nationally and internationally, including honorary award at the International Making Cities Livable Conference in Ottawa, Canada (2018), RIBA Research Fund (2018) and the William Sutton Prize for Excellence in Social Housing Design and Placemaking from Clarion Housing Group (2018).



velocityplacemaking.co.uk