

**POSITION PAPER ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION FROM  
ADVANCED OXFORD  
October, 2025**

## **Purpose**

Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation are taking shape, and promoters of different options for new unitary authorities in Oxfordshire are finalising their submissions to Government. This position paper sets out Advanced Oxford's call for (i) the economy - growth and economic development, and (ii) effective and meaningful relationships with business, to be fundamental to the work of new unitary council(s) that are to be created as a result of the process.

As a membership-based organisation, Advanced Oxford members have a range of views on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). As a consequence, Advanced Oxford will not seek to identify a preferred configuration for local government within Oxfordshire and the region. Nevertheless, there are clear principles and approaches that we have identified that we consider to be important and fundamental in driving better outcomes and we are asking that these be applied, whatever the configuration of local government, following the reorganisation.

## **Three options for LGR in Oxfordshire**

We note that three options for LGR are under consideration, each being proposed and promoted by different Oxfordshire authorities. Each of these proposal would replace the six existing authorities operating across the county at present (Oxfordshire County Council; Cherwell District Council; Oxford City Council; South Oxfordshire District Council; Vale of the White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council).

The first is a proposal for a [single county-wide unitary](#), which is being proposed by Oxfordshire County Council.

The second is a proposal to create two authorities, a [Ridgeway Council](#) to the south and a [Oxford & the Shires Council](#) to the north of the county.

A third proposal is to create three new unitary authorities. This would comprise of an expanded city unitary authority, alongside a new council to the north and another to the south. The City Council is proposing and championing this option [Greater Oxford website](#).

Detailed proposals will be submitted to government at the end of November, 2025.

LGR is a pathway to devolution of powers and the creation of a role for a future Mayor, and of a proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority, which is likely to operate at the scale of the Thames Valley. The Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) will include responsibility for economic development, inward investment, strategic transport and skills. Local Government Reorganisation is a step towards devolution in which the relationship with the new Mayor and unitary authority(ies) will be critical to our economic success. Despite the intention to create an MSA with these responsibilities, Advanced Oxford believes that unitary authority(ies) within the region must take an active role in developing the strategy, planning for and delivering these key functions, not least as the creation of an MSA is not foreseen until later in this Parliament.

### **The economy and business should be at the heart of the agenda for a new configuration of unitary authority(ies)**

Regardless of the configuration agreed by Government following the submission of proposals in November, we want to see all options consider the economy, growth and the relationship with business in an active and meaningful way. Whether LGR results in one, two or three unitary authorities, local government should work together to support the whole of the Oxfordshire region and its innovation economy.

We want the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation to ensure that lessons from the past are applied and new approaches taken, to sustain a dynamic Oxfordshire economy – LGR must not result in more of the same.

The Oxfordshire economy is significant nationally, with its strengths in science, technology and innovation related sectors. It is a dynamic landscape, with significant alignment to the Modern Industrial Strategy and the sectors identified within it. New areas of focus, such as Security and Defence related industries, which are of growing importance within the Industrial Strategy, are strongly represented within the region. Local Government Reorganisation should specifically address and support these strengths, leading to new investment, including in new science and business parks, places and new clusters.

We want Local Government Reorganisation to result in improved and valued business relationships and consideration of business interests to be central to the strategy, planning and operation of new unitary authority(ies).

Specifically, we want to see Local Government Reorganisation lead to:

- A clear vision and support for growth, especially economic growth and productivity, by both the new unitary council(s) and the new Mayoral Strategic Authority, to secure a high value economy, supported by the foundational economy.

- A drive to implement the Government's National Industrial Strategy and its 8 industrial strategy sectors across Oxfordshire, to strengthen key sectors and clusters to strengthen the economy of Oxfordshire.
- A closer collaborative relationship with the business community, especially with the importance of the science and technology community across Oxfordshire on a range of business sites, not just on the edge of Oxford City.
- A process of real and meaningful engagement with business through regular meetings on strategic planning matters and how the local economy is evolving, not just consultation on Local Plan stages.
- A commitment to taking account of business views and sector voices in the economic strategy pursued and the decisions of new unitary authority(ies), including regular engagement with Advanced Oxford.
- A plan for the improved coordination and handling of inward investment enquiries.
- More active support for the skills and training measures essential to economic growth, working with the region's businesses, universities and other skills providers.
- Support the provision of more affordable housing in both urban and rural Oxfordshire, to support economic growth and address the previous undersupply. Oxford has become an unaffordable city which creates a business risk.
- Support for the growth of the City of Oxford and the market towns across Oxfordshire.
- An investment in a programme of agreed infrastructure priorities, in both transport, expansion of the grid and upgrading essential water and sewage infrastructure. One early priority should be the regeneration of Oxford's railway station and the surrounding area, with an emphasis on generating a strong sense of place and arrival.
- A commitment to take measures to speed up the planning process, from consents for proposed development and the making of Local Plans (and future Spatial Development Strategies), both of which have been painfully slow. We are looking for speed and more certainty in the planning process, including through the work of strategic consultees.
- A commitment to expand the use of Local Development Orders to support economic development at the science and business parks across the County would be one step towards speeding up planning for economic proposals. The

approach taken at Milton Park in the Vale of White Horse is a powerful model to follow.

- Reassurance and transparency that S106 monies will be spent much more quickly on the investment and mitigation for which they have been secured. Monies not spent within 10 years, on the purpose for which they have been secured, should be repaid. Better communication and transparency in regard to this matter is needed.
- Clarity on the use of monies secured through the Enterprise Zones being used for the purpose secured. We would like to see the current opaque process made transparent.
- Avoiding the introduction of new costs on business, through planning processes and other policy proposals from the new council(s).
- Full active engagement with the Growth Commission for Oxford(shire) and the Oxford and Cambridge Growth Corridor, with support for a programme of measures designed to support its development, as a driver of economic growth.

## **Annex: About Advanced Oxford and background**

### **About Advanced Oxford**

Advanced Oxford is a group of senior leaders from the area's major knowledge-intensive businesses who are working together to support the long-term development of the Oxford region as a dynamic and prosperous place to work and live.

Advanced Oxford is research-led, providing insight, analysis and a united voice for our members on the key issues affecting the development of the innovation economy and ecosystem in the Oxford region.

### **Oxford and Oxfordshire – a scientific super-cluster.**

The ambition to place the UK at the forefront of science and technology is embodied in the Government's concept of the UK as a 'Scientific Superpower'. The role of science and technology in fuelling economic growth and new jobs is at the heart of this ambition. Oxfordshire's Innovation Engine, 2023, was produced to ensure that Oxfordshire builds on its position as a leading tech cluster, and to assist in positioning Oxford, and the Oxfordshire region, as a place that is consistently associated with science and innovation.

Oxfordshire's innovation ecosystem -

- Oxfordshire is a thriving innovation ecosystem which has grown and developed substantially in the last 10 years
- The region is recognised for its universities and research institutions and for its strong industrial base and its thriving community of spin-outs and start-ups.
- There are 2,950 high-tech businesses employing 29k people.
- 1,500 of these companies are highly innovative, science, technology, engineering and maths-based companies.
- 17k people are employed in R&D intensive companies.
- 5.7k patent applications have been made by Oxfordshire based firms and institutions in the last 5 years (to 2022).
- The region's science parks and campuses have swelled in numbers and have grown substantially in the last decade.
- 64% of the region's businesses are innovation-active according to the UK Innovation Survey

Oxfordshire's Innovation Engine – “a jewel in the crown of the UK Innovation Economy”.

The first Oxfordshire Innovation Engine report, *Realising the Growth Potential*, was published in the autumn of 2013. It was followed two and a half years later by an 'Update Report' that assessed progress against the actions and recommendations

proposed in 2013. Ten years on, Advanced Oxford produced *Oxfordshire's Innovation Engine 2023*, which reassesses the region's science and technology ecosystem, looking forward, but also looking back over the last decade.

Oxfordshire has a thriving and diverse innovation ecosystem. The region's knowledge economy has grown considerably in the last decade, both the stock of companies and employment, although high and medium-tech manufacturing has declined, possibly as manufacturing activities move out of the region as companies scale. The region's growth has a more international outlook. Companies that started in Oxfordshire are trading and expanding internationally as inward investors into new territories, reflecting the global markets in which they operate.

Key current challenges include infrastructure, skills and housing.

**Recommendations from Oxfordshire's Innovation Engine, 2023:**

Recommendation 1: Strengthen leadership across the region in relation to innovation.

Recommendation 2: Develop a much needed, future-looking transport system, which is Oxfordshire-wide, not just focused on the City of Oxford.

Recommendation 3: Grow and diversify the number of risk capital investors operating within the region.

Recommendation 4: Develop a new clear, strategy, with collective buy-in, for inward investment into the region. Different players within the ecosystem need to work together to ensure that Oxfordshire is open, coherent and can respond to potential investors.

Recommendation 5: Join up nodes of innovation across the region and help internal and external stakeholders to navigate the landscape through better defined pathways and connectors.

Recommendation 6: Develop a suite of communications tools and assets, tailored to the needs of different audiences, which can be used by all players, to tell Oxfordshire's innovation story.