

Oxfordshire 2050 Reg 18 (2) Consultation, Autumn 2021 - Need not Greed Oxfordshire

WHERE DO WE START FROM?

The Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) informs the OP2050 Plan and is the basis for the Growth Options outlined within it. This is the first of two NNGO technical papers analysing the OGNA, in this case looking at the approach the OGNA takes to population figures.

Please refer also to the NNGO Main Response, and a second paper - What's wrong with the 3 Growth Options? - which provides further critical analysis of other elements of the OGNA.

This paper shows that the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) is not based on the Government's Standard Method using the 2014-based household projections. Nor does it use the more up to date (Office for National Statistics - ONS) 2018 based projections. Instead, the consultants who prepared this assessment have used a variety of questionable and in our view unjustified techniques to manipulate data from various sources to produce over-estimated population projections.

The OGNA proposes that the population of Oxfordshire will grow far faster between 2020 and 2050 than ONS suggests. It suggests that ONS underestimates the population of Oxfordshire in 2050 by over 76,000 people.

The OGNA Phase 1 report does not tell you how large these differences are. It does not tell you that the large amounts added are unevenly distributed across the five districts.

NNGO believes that these changes are unjustified and should NOT have been made. NNGO believes that only the 2021 Census results will - in due course - tell us how many people live in Oxfordshire.

NNGO's overall conclusion on the OGNA is that it is sufficiently flawed that it should be subject to an independent peer-review before it can be relied on as an appropriate evidence base for the OP2050 Plan.

SUMMARY

This paper shows that the OGNA consultant has not used the 2014-based household projections. Nor does the consultant accept the 2018 based projections made by the government's Office for National Statistics (ONS). Instead, they add very large numbers of people to the 2018 based ONS figures. The main effects are that:

- Over 26,000 people are added to the 2020 population of Oxfordshire. 10,000 more are added in Oxford
- Over 76,000 people are added to the 2050 population of Oxfordshire. 52,000 more are added in Oxford and over 5,000 are deducted in the Vale

So, the OGNA increases population growth in Oxfordshire by 50,000 people compared to the ONS figures.

The ONS figures are consistent with projections for other parts of England. Thus, migrants arriving in Oxfordshire, from elsewhere in England, will have been deducted from the figures for other areas. The OGNA figures are not consistent. They do not show the effects of having more migrants into Oxfordshire from other parts of England.

It is clear that:

- The OGNA figures conceal the overall effects of these changes - apparently this is deliberate;
- The extra OGNA population is not consistent with the ONS projections for other parts of England; and
- The effects on other parts of England are not shown.
- The arbitrary and unjustified additional growth of 50,000 is not clear from the OGNA report. This puts pressure on to zone too much land for housing, jobs and infrastructure. Over-zoning means that we lose control of which land is developed first and housing land supply targets are not met

ONS PROJECTIONS & THE OGNA FIGURES

Straightforward projections of the figures produced by the ONS suggest that we only need 53,000 houses more in Oxfordshire between now and 2050. That figure allows for more net in-migration than the average for the 18 years to 2019 - so a higher rate of growth than in the past.

However, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation proposes 3 different growth options:

- **Standard Method** - 102,000 houses - 1 new house for every 3 we have now
- **Business as Usual** - 123,000 houses - far above existing growth rates; and
- **Transformational** - 153,000 houses - 1 new house for every 2 we have now

But why is there so much growth?

One reason is that the Consultant who produced the above figures completely disagrees with the Government ONS figures. The Consultant suggests that:

- There are 26,000 more people living in Oxfordshire in 2020 than the Government ONS figures suggest; and that
- By 2050 there will be 76,000 more people living in Oxfordshire than the Government ONS trend-based projections suggest.

The scale of these changes is not made clear in the consultant's report. The proposed higher starting point in 2020 tends to push up future growth projections.

Details of these considerable changes and criticisms follow.

In 2020 the change proposed is:

Changes made to the 2020 Population Projections

	2020	Change		2020
	ONS Government Original	Number	Percent	As Adjusted by the Consultant
	Table 3.7.2			Table 3.8.2
Cherwell	150,862	5,597	3.7%	156,459
Oxford	153,580	10,276	6.7%	163,856
South Oxon	141,840	5,321	3.8%	147,161
Vale of WH	137,175	1,570	1.1%	138,745
West Oxon	110,391	3,948	3.6%	114,339
Oxfordshire	693,848	26,712	3.8%	720,560

Source: Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment Phase 1 Report 24.06.21.pdf

So, overall, Oxfordshire's population in 2020 was revised to be 26,712 more than the Government ONS figures. In particular, Oxford's population was increased by 10,000 people. This is a considerable and unjustified increase.

The ONS mid-year population estimate for 2020

NNGO notes the recently released ONS mid-year estimate for 2020. This would not have been available to the Consultant when the OGNA was produced. The ONS estimates that the population of Oxfordshire is 696,880 in 2020. This is 3,032 more than the Consultant's figure in the Table above, of 693,848. It is nowhere near the Consultant's adjusted figure of 720,560 though. It is 23,680 less.

NNGO also notes that the ONS mid-year estimate for 2020 shows that the population of Oxford is 151,584. This is less than the ONS estimate in the Table above. It is nowhere near the Consultant's adjusted figure of 163,856. It is 12,272 less.

The 2020 ONS mid-year estimate shows signs of the Covid issues that emerged in January 2020. NNGO has noted that:

- Very sadly, the number of deaths has increased. This was 14% more than in the year 2018/19 (5,449 increased to 6,227). The figure of 6,227 is more than any in the previous 18 years. Covid was responsible no doubt;
- The number of births continues to decline, from a peak of 8,595 in 2010-2011 to 7,119 in 2019-2020. The aging population and maybe employment and affordability issues for young adults could be factors driving this;
- Net Internal migration (within the UK) has increased from +632 in 2018/19 to +2,868 in 2019/20. The 2,868 is a high figure compared to previous trends - it was often negative in previous years. But this conceals the fact that the numbers moving in and out both reduced considerably as shown below:

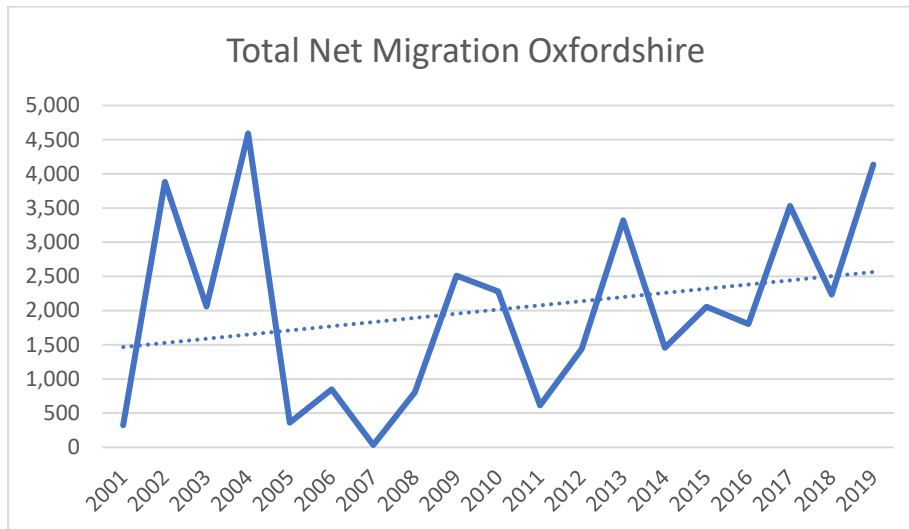
Oxfordshire – Internal migration (To or from the rest of the UK)			
Year	Inflows	Outflows	Net effect
2018-19	+40,215	-39,586	+632
2019-20	+38,034	-35,166	+2,868
Change year to year	-2,184	+4,420	+2,236

The numbers of people moving in reduced by 2,184. But there was a larger reduction in the numbers moving out 4,420. So the net effect was an increase of 2,236.

- In contrast, Net international migration to Oxfordshire reduced from 1,603 in 2018/19 to 1,267 in 2019/20.
- Thus overall, net migration into Oxfordshire was 4,135 in 2019/20 (2,868 + 1,267).
- Overall, the population of Oxfordshire increased by 5,213 between 2019 and 2020. This was not exceptional - the average increase over the previous 18 years was 4,688.
- Overall, population growth in Oxfordshire has continued in a more or less linear trend since 2001. The increase was 89,603 in 19 years.

It is more difficult for ONS to get the migration figures ‘right’ in a Pandemic.

Net migration over the last 19 years has oscillated, probably in part due to estimation errors. The figures are illustrated by the following chart:



A period of fairly rapid growth up to about 2005 has been followed by a slowly rising trend. The figures are nowhere near the 11,000 estimate of the level net migration needs to be to get to the ‘Transformational’ level of growth.

NNGO expects that the next ONS mid-year estimate, for 2021, will be similarly affected by Covid issues, affecting migration and sadly, the number of deaths.

The new information for 2019-2020 shows that the unusual and unexpected can happen. NNGO expects that the figures for 2020-2021 will do the same. Our future will not follow a smooth path. We need flexibility, resilience and resources to deal with these uncertainties. Will committing to decades of very rapid growth in Oxfordshire give us more flexibility, resilience and resources? NNGO does not think so.

NNGO will point out in this and its other paper where we disagree with the OGNA approach.

Why the changes?

The Consultant made many changes to the assumptions used in the 2018 based projections. These are set out in Section 3.7 of the report. In summary, the four significant changes are:

1. ONS has a 'variant' of their projections. This changed the assumptions about migration within England. The main ONS figures rely on migration patterns within two previous years, but the 'Alternative Internal' variant considers a five-year period. This option reduces the growth rate in Oxfordshire - it **reduces** the projected population in 2041 by 19,081.¹

ONS also produced other variants for their projections. Only the 'High international' variant produced more growth than their main figures. But this variant seems very unlikely now, as we have left the EU and imposed 'points-based' controls on migration from abroad. Covid issues also seem likely to restrict international migration for some years.

Two other variants produce less growth - one was 'low international migration' which seems quite likely. The other is an alternative migration variant based on the last ten years - so based on more past experience and data, rather than just five years.

However, this large reduction is cancelled out by three other assumptions made by the Consultant. These are:

2. Data from the NHS Patient Register (PR) is used to justify an increase in the 2018 starting point. The PR data (Table 3.4.1) shows that in Oxford, from 2011 to 2018, the PR increased by 65,600, whereas the ONS population estimate increased by about half that, 32,650. So, the Patient register arguably suggests that Oxford's population should be more than the ONS figures.

However, there are good reasons for having doubts about the Patient Register data². For example, it is not good at picking up when people leave to go abroad, such as when foreign students return home from studying in Oxford. Or presumably when UK students move away from Oxford on graduation.

Also, we note that the same table shows that during 2011 to 2018, the population of England increased by 4.1million according to the Patient Register, but by only 2.8million according to the ONS estimates. Surely the ONS figures are not underestimating national growth by 1.3million people?

¹ From 746,578 to 727,497. Table 3.7.3

² See:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/methodologies/patientregisterqualityassuranceofadministrativedatausedinpopulationstatisticsdec2016>

Growth rates from 2011 to 2018 are as follows:

Area	Patient Register growth %	ONS Growth%
Oxford	14.1%	2.7%
Oxfordshire	9.5%	5.0%
England	7.5%	5.4%

Source Table 3.4.1 of the OGNA Phase 1 report.

So, there is a large difference in Oxford (probably due to its large student population and workers from abroad). However, Oxfordshire's overall County percentages - which includes the Oxford figure - are not that far from the England figures. So there seems no good reason for an overall increase of 26,000 people across Oxfordshire, or to throw such doubt on the local ONS figures. Presumably ONS have considered this Patient Register (PR) data, which they produce and they would have used it if it was appropriate? As the Consultant's report says:

It should be noted that it is not recommended to use the PR data to establish the size of the population at a point in time: this is because this source does tend to overstate population as some people may be registered with a GP in more than one location - this tends to particularly impact on areas with larger numbers of younger people and student populations.³

But nevertheless, PR data is used to 'establish the size of the population at a point in time'. Massive and unjustified increases in Oxfordshire populations result...

3. To get from a 2018 figure to 2020, net housing completion figures are used. However, these are not shown in Table 3.6.1 or Figure 3.6.1, which both only run up to 2017/18. So, it is not possible to comment on this assumption, but only to say that as such there is no justification for it in the paper.
4. To get to the Consultant's higher figures in 2020, more migration is needed during the period 2018 to 2020. That assumed higher migration rate is then

³ From Section 3.4

used for the period 2020 to 2050. As OGNA Phase 1 report says (page 37, bullet point 5):

‘Future migration is estimated based on the likely uplift in migration needed to achieve the level of population estimated for 2018.’

This is unjustified speculation, to say the least:

- Firstly, it is apparently an assumption based on the previous assumptions made by the Consultant, that inflated the 2018 population by 5,558⁴ but then the 2020 population by 26,712 people
- Secondly, even if migration was at a much higher rate in 2018-20⁵, it is wild speculation to assume that this will continue for a thirty-year period starting in 2020.

In the last three cases above, the Consultant’s report never makes it clear what the effects of these individual changes are. This seems to be a wilful and deliberate attempt to disguise the significant effects of the various assumptions. The drastic overall effect in 2020 is to arbitrarily add 26,000 more people to the population of Oxfordshire as estimated by a more than competent national body - ONS.

ONS figures now show that net migration to Oxfordshire in 2018 to 2020 was 6,370⁶ - hardly exceptional.

The effects of these assumptions are dramatic, as the next table for 2050 shows.

Other points

Table 3.6.2 shows net migration figures for the County in recent years, up to 2017 to 2018 when it was estimated to be 3,529. It is then argued, based on Figure 3.6.1 that net migration is on a rising trend. The more recent net migration figures tend to undermine this suggestion as:

⁴ From 687,524 in 2018 (Table 3.7.2) to 693,082 (Table 3.8.2)

⁵ The ONS figures give average net migration 2018-2020 as 3,185 = (2,235+4,135)/2 but we know 2019-2020 was affected by Covid and the average for the last 19 years is 2,015.

⁶ 6,370 = 2,235 + 4,135

- 2018 to 2019 - The net migration figure is 2,235, which is lower than the previous year; and
- 2019 to 2020 - The net migration figure is 4,135, larger, but this figure could be distorted by the effects of the Covid pandemic, as described earlier.

The previous chart shows the trends in net migration, which tend to oscillate. A linear trend (dotted line) is added to the chart, but the rise is not that steep - from +1,500pa in the early 2000's to +2500 more recently. That is an increase of only +1,000 over 19 years. Projecting that forward even for 30 years, only ends up with net migration of around 4,079⁷pa by 2050. Nowhere near the 11,000pa needed to achieve the 'Transformational' option. And there is no guarantee that this trend would continue.

It is reasonably clear that the impact of Covid has had significant effects on migration from 2019 to 2020. This seems likely to continue in the following year, 2020 to 2021. The net effect of migration from outside the UK to Oxfordshire has been on a downward trend. It reduced from +1,603 in 2018-2019 to -1,267 in 2019-2020. The size of flows increased, but outflows increased by more than inflows. Overseas students and migrant workers from the EU are included in these estimates.

What are the effects in 2050?

Rolling the Consultant's assumptions forward for 30 years, has, not surprisingly, some considerable effects (See table on next page).

Overall, if the trends alleged by the consultant continue, there would be over 76,000 more people in Oxfordshire than the 2018 based ONS figures suggest. Most - 52,000 of them would supposedly be in Oxford - more than the population of Banbury?? 15,000 more in Cherwell, 10,000 more in South Oxfordshire?? But oddly a 5,000 decrease in the Vale?? This is no longer a believable projection it is a distorted, unbelievable, inflated guess.

⁷ 4,079 = 2,500 + ((30/19) x 1,000)

Changes made to the 2050 Population Projections

	2050	Change		2050
	ONS Government Original Table 3.7.2	Number	Percent	As Adjusted by the Consultant Table 3.8.2
Cherwell	165,325	14,892	9.0%	180,217
Oxford	147,005	52,056	35.4%	199,061
South Oxon	152,581	9,890	6.5%	162,471
Vale of WH	160,545	-5,445	-3.4%	155,100
West Oxon	115,483	4,688	4.1%	120,171
Oxfordshire	740,939	76,081	10.3%	817,020

Implications

It is reasonably clear that the Consultant has searched through many options to find ones that increases the figures, then added them in. When even more growth is added by the three options, the result on the ground in Oxfordshire will be disastrous over-zoning of land that is never likely to be built on. This will be damaging to both local people, the environment and for property developers. Our planning system will lose control of which sites should be developed in what order.

Table 3.5.1 shows another interesting feature of Oxfordshire migrants. Net **internal** migration (within England, Wales and Scotland) over 17 years has been minus 20,175 people. It was only positive in one year. That means the County more or less continually ‘exports’ people to other parts of GB.

Net **international** migration in contrast has been positive in contrast at 52,092 people and this has been positive every year shown. So large international migrant flows have apparently driven the population increases in Oxfordshire. It seems likely that international migration will reduce as it is more difficult for EU citizens to move here and we have a points-led system that discourages low-paid workers.

So, unless the normal outflows to the rest of the country from Oxfordshire reverse, the population of Oxfordshire will fall.

Overall, a 76,000 increase in Oxfordshire's population has been added to trend-based projections. This is a massive increase. Of that increase, 49,369⁸ is expected during 2020-2050. To achieve that, the number of net migrants each year for 30 years must increase by about 1,646. This adds 82% to the average annual figure for the last 19 years of 2,015. The 49,369 increase, which is supposed to be trend-based and a baseline, is in fact it is a highly optimistic guess about the distant future.

Over time, net internal migration has been on an upward trend, with a high figure in 2019-2020 - but that year has been affected by Covid issues. Net international migration in contrast has been on a long term decline.

There are considerable risks to Oxfordshire as a result. There is a very real risk that there would be a massive over-zoning of land. This would mean we lose control of where development actually takes place. Developers would no longer be sure that they could complete any site for the next 30 years. Development could start on many sites but completion might take decades - so there would be an unpredictable, damaging long-term patchwork of part-completed sites. Infrastructure improvements would either over-deliver or just not be available. Pointless and widespread environmental damage would occur.

It gets worse, as to these figures will be added further vast amounts of purely speculative growth. NNGO estimates that if the 'Transformational' option is in place, the population of Oxfordshire could be over a million at 1,024,000 a 48%⁹ increase from 2020.

2021 Census

In truth, all these adjustments to bases and projections are likely to be inaccurate. In the fairly near future, 2021 Census data will start to be released - information about population numbers, age groups and migration should be the first to appear. As ten years have passed since the last Census, the recent mid-year population and household estimates and projections may well be inaccurate. Census data was mostly collected online, so provisional analyses should not take too long to appear.

Census data should pick up the immediate effects of 10 years of change plus the Banking crisis, Brexit, and in particular, Covid. There is some evidence that many EU workers have returned home from Oxfordshire as their jobs ended and that foreign student numbers are reduced.

⁸ 49,369 = 76,081 – 26,712

⁹ Assuming starting from the ONS figure of 693,848 in 2020 and adding 330,000 people (148,000 households average size 2.23)

NNGO recommends that we should completely discard all the consultant's amendments and rely on the expertise of ONS. ONS figures are compatible with other areas, whereas the consultants' figures are not. Also, we should suspend judgement and decisions with such long-lasting and potentially damaging implications until we are more certain about where we are starting from as a result of the 2021 Census.

NNGO's overall conclusion on the OGNA is that it is sufficiently flawed that it should be subject to an independent peer-review before it can be relied on as an appropriate evidence base for the OP2050 Plan.

References

This note mainly refers to the following paper issued as part of the Consultation:

Oxfordshire Growth Board, Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, Phase 1 Report
24.06.21



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About Need Not Greed Oxfordshire

Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of 36 groups from across the county, representing thousands of community members. Our campaign is committed to:

- A restoration of planning principles, with a proper balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations;
- Local democracy, with planning control in the hands of locally elected and accountable representatives; and
- Environmental and rural sustainability, ensuring that our landscape, natural world and rural communities are at the heart of decision-making.