



OXFORDSHIRE BUSINESSES DIVIDED OVER EUROPE

“Until the British government is prepared to properly invest in the future, which will then encourage British manufacturers to invest, we have a skills gap that needs filling. Manufacturing produces real things that make real money and is earned by people at all levels of our community.”

Roger Dyer, director at JEL Business Process Improvement

Opinion among business leaders who responded to the Oxfordshire Business Barometer is divided, reflecting the results of UK-wide polls.

Just over one-third (34 per cent) would like to see a referendum on Europe go ahead in 2017 as promised by the current Government while slightly more (36 per cent) do not think there should be a referendum at all.

Roger Dyer, director at JEL Business Process Improvement in Oxford, is one of them. He believes a referendum would send out the wrong message to colleagues and business partners in Europe.

He explained: “I started my life in engineering as an apprentice at Rover Ltd in Oxford along with 100 others. The government sponsored our training—but during my first year this was stopped for all future years. The next year’s intake was 15 apprentices, the following just four.

“In the past, many Oxfordshire-based engineers went on to join the motor sport industry or set up businesses of their own. Typically these were highly skilled machinists, toolmakers and designers. Their input to

the economy, employment and prosperity of Oxfordshire has been immense. But the lack of understanding and responsibility of successive governments has led to a vacuum of real skills and future business owners,” Mr Dyer added.

“The European nations, in particular Poland, have taken a different approach and continue to encourage apprenticeships, provide incentives and promote engineering as a good career choice.

“I spent six years working as an advisor for a government funded programme, the Manufacturing Advisory Service, which continues to produce great results. During this time I worked with many small and medium-sized manufacturers who can only exist by tapping into the skills available from eastern European nations.

“Their technical skills are high and their work ethic is great. Until the British government is prepared to properly invest in the future, which will then encourage British manufacturers to invest, we have a skills gap that needs filling. Manufacturing produces real things that make real money and is earned by people at all levels of our community.”

Mr Dyer said: “Having a referendum sends out a message that we do not want, nor value our

European colleagues’ skills and that is far, far from the truth, particularly in manufacturing.”

Mark Emery, employment law partner at Withy King, agreed: “It has been recognised for some time that Oxfordshire along with many other parts of the UK has an acute skills shortage in some areas.

“Engineering is just one example where there is a shortfall of engineering apprentices and graduates, currently running at around 50,000 per year.

“I think businesses need to be encouraged to do more to engage with young people in schools and colleges to ensure they understand all their career options, particularly in industry, so that we can start to develop a pipeline of future talent.

“O2i based in Oxford is one example of a scheme which is taking on this challenge. Some large companies are starting to require sub-contractors to offer apprenticeships as a contractual obligation, but unfortunately this is still a complicated and cumbersome process.”

Mr Emery added: “Until businesses, local authorities, education facilities and central government work more closely to find solutions to our skills challenges, we will have to continue to rely on Europe to plug the gaps.”

30 per cent of Oxfordshire Business Barometer respondents are offering apprenticeships to try and attract the best and brightest people in today’s challenging employment market

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

TALKING EUROPE AND THE BUDGET OVER A PIE AND A PINT

The Business Barometer community was asked to give their views on Europe and the Budget in the most recent survey

From a business continuity perspective, three-quarters (74 per cent) of Oxfordshire businesses surveyed would like to see the UK stay in Europe but on renegotiated terms which include less business regulation.

One-fifth (22 per cent) would be happy to stay in, on current terms, but most respondents (59 per cent) said they'd like to see less red tape.

Richard Baxter, corporate law partner at Withy King, and Gerry Jackson, director at Critchleys, headed down to their local pub to debate the issues over a pie and a pint.

Europe: Referendum and Participation

Gerry: Overall I am in favour of being in. A referendum can only be healthy and 2017 seems sensible.

Richard: Agreed, but on the basis of 'more common market' and 'less common government/imposition on national sovereignty,' although can we really negotiate new terms?

Gerry: We may be able to implement change but only if we are in. The main problem appears to be the design of the institutions

and the disproportionate representation of smaller states. Electoral reform is problematic, however, even in a domestic context.

Richard: Where the first past the post system appears to be becoming ever more unfit for purpose against a decline in a two party system.

Gerry: No-one accuses Germany of having ineffective administrations under a PR system but Italy is no advert for coalition government.

Richard: But who do we have more in common with?

Red Tape

Gerry: Not sure to what extent the regulatory burden on business is European and/or domestic? Certainly both should be cut.

Richard: Tacitus said, 'the more laws a state has the more corrupt it is' but life has become ever more complex and where there are global private interests, there will always be some requirement for multinational institutions of some kind.

Gerry: I fear there is an element of exaggeration in some of the tabloid press about the worst excesses of EU regulation. Clearly a balance should be struck, however, and the expense of the institutions kept in check.

The forthcoming Budget: Fantasy Chancellor

Richard: We are meeting before the Budget although this piece will be published between the Budget and the election. What measures would you really like to see (regardless of the fact they will never happen in this Budget)?

Gerry: I would like to see employers' NI reduced. It won't happen as NIC is one of the three big money makers for the government (along with PAYE income tax and VAT). It would not simply reduce employment costs, it would stop economic distortion generated by all the methods businesses use to try and avoid employee status. NI is predominantly used to fund pension provision and unemployment benefits.



*Richard Baxter,
partner and
head of the
corporate team
at Withy King's
Oxford office*

Richard: So I suppose a measure that would reduce employment costs and potentially increase employment would tie back in to the issue of EU regulation and employment rights generally? In my understanding the UK tends to 'gold-plate' EU employment regulations and directives in any event.

Gerry: It always strikes me as something of a turn-around that there is now tax relief by way of no NI on the first slice of unearned income while the burden on earned income continues to increase.

Richard: Any other vain hopes on the 'wish list'?

Gerry: A reduction in VAT would also stimulate activity in my view but again the Government will not agree I fear!

Crystal ball gazing

Richard: So turning to more probable matters what do you think we may be served up in the Budget?

Gerry: Difficult to predict what the headline grabber may be this time. An increase in the threshold for the 40 per cent rate of tax has been mooted but I fear it would be seen as too 'pro the rich' for this Budget. An increase in the personal allowance to c£12.5k? As ever the detail will be in the detail and we will have to see how the underlying figures impact the usual pre-election 'bounty'.

Richard: Here's to that Gerry. Another half before the duty rises?



*Gerry
Jackson,
director at
Critchleys*

The single measure which businesses were most hoping to see in the Chancellor's Budget is more reliefs around employing people (43 per cent), followed by a reduction in business rates (22 per cent), according to the last Oxfordshire Business Barometer. So did the Chancellor George Osborne deliver or has he left Oxfordshire businesses feeling disappointed? Two professional advisers gave their reactions

DID THE CHANCELLOR'S BUDGET DELIVER FOR OXFORDSHIRE BUSINESSES?

The accountant's perspective: **Tony Hobbs, managing director at CRM Oxford**

"The Budget contained few surprises and little for the tax planning community to get excited about. The biggest headlines, albeit leaked beforehand, were about the abolition of tax returns.

"There is little detail in the Budget documents, but this is almost certainly really about more information being delivered electronically and directly from the income providers.

"There is some reduction in available tax reliefs. The lifetime limit which is currently £1.25m, is to reduce to £1m next year but will from 2018 be indexed with the Retail Prices Index.

"The temporary increase in annual investment allowance to £500,000 is due to expire on 31 December 2015 when it is scheduled to drop back to £25,000.

"While accepting the inadequacy of the reduced limit Mr Osborne has not as yet said

what he will do about this in the future. The current level of the AIA means that the vast majority of businesses will be able to obtain full tax relief from capital expenditure (other than cars) in the year of purchase.

"Based on current rules, there will be a significant cash flow benefit to purchasing capital equipment before December 31, 2015 than after (subject to further announcements).

"It is also worth noting that purchasing new equipment just before year end, rather than just after, will accelerate the cash flow benefit of the tax relief by a year.

"On Inheritance Tax, the use of Deeds of Variation as a planning tool is to be reviewed by HMRC later in the year.

"The existence of the scope for a post-death Deed of Variation sometimes makes people more relaxed than they should be about Wills so with a threat hanging over them, now might be a good time to consider revisiting Will planning generally.

"There was a 'feelgood factor' to this Budget, but we cannot of course forget that in an election year the Chancellor will always want to be seen to be giving more than he takes!"



The property agent's perspective: **Mark Charter, head of property agency at Carter Jonas' Oxford office**

The Chancellor announced a new Help-to-Buy ISA to assist first-time buyers saving for mortgage deposits. The Government will provide a £50 top-up for every £200 saved by an individual.

"The proposed scheme will, like the Help-to-Buy equity loan and mortgage guarantee schemes, undoubtedly boost demand for starter homes.

"But unlike Help-to-Buy, this demand should be better distributed as participants save and enter the market at different times, preventing a possible super-charging at the lower end of the market.

"However this initiative will not alleviate the severe shortage of stock affordable to first-time buyers; it will essentially create more demand.

"We were anticipating that this

year's Budget would address the escalating lack of supply and focus more on incentivising institutional investment in the private rented sector, which would offer a bridge or transition for many people between the current levels of unaffordability of buying property and a longer-term rebalancing of the house price/affordability ratio.

"However we await the revelation of the 20 'new housing zones' with great expectations.

"Two days before the Budget announcement, Danny Alexander MP announced a wide ranging review of national business rates — currently paid on 1.8 million properties.

"There is no doubt that we need much greater local control of business rates revenues to help support businesses big and small, plus shops, pubs and cafes on our high streets.

"The Business Rates review will report back at Budget 2016. So we are encouraging our clients to have their say and play a small part in hopefully overhauling this outdated system for not only their benefit but consumers and the local and national economy as a whole."



RECRUITMENT

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN A CHALLENGING EMPLOYMENT MARKET

With the pool of quality job candidates shrinking rapidly in today's competitive employment market, businesses are becoming more innovative in an effort to attract and retain the best and brightest staff



Kate Allen,
managing
director
at Allen
Associates

The latest Oxfordshire Business Barometer shows that employers are investing in training and development and offering clear career pathways, improving working environments and workplace culture, upwardly revising salaries, boosting benefits packages and providing greater incentives.

These measures were welcomed by Kate Allen, managing director at independent recruitment consultancy Allen Associates, which she established with her finance director husband Rob in Oxford in 1998.

She said: "I am delighted that so many employers are taking the necessary steps to ensure they provide the environment, opportunities and rewards which candidates expect in today's fast-paced employment market. Our best candidates are being presented with multiple job offers within a short space of time so it is crucial that employers can compete effectively.

"Unfortunately, some of our clients are losing out because their recruitment procedures are out of step with current market conditions. Many first interviews, for example, now take place on Skype rather than face-to-face, moving suitable candidates onto second interviews at a much quicker rate. Businesses with more traditional recruitment practices are in danger of getting left behind.

"We would like to encourage businesses to review their approach to recruitment and make any necessary adjustments to ensure they are in a position to move quickly and decisively."

Allen Associates also suggests employers focus on areas most likely to resonate with the type of recruits they are targeting.

Kate Allen explained: "Research shows that the Y-Generation, for example, are influenced by their working environment, clear objectives and key performance indicators, career progression, strong two-way communication, team working, training and new technology. Benefits packages for this age group need to reflect this.

"Investors in People provides an excellent best practice framework for employers and sends a strong signal to existing staff as well as potential new recruits. We were the first recruitment company to be awarded Investors in People Gold status and it has proved to be one of the best things we have done."

West Waddy ADP

Another company to have gone for gold is architectural and town planning practice, West Waddy ADP based in Abingdon, which also recently achieved Investors in People (IIP) Gold. Only one other similar company in England has achieved this standard.

Partner Philip Waddy said the firm sees IIP as a route towards successful recruitment and retention in a market where suitably qualified professionals are hard to come by.



With the pool of quality recruits shrinking rapidly in today's competitive employment market, what steps, if any, is your business taking to attract the best and brightest staff?

46% are investing in their working environment and culture

38% are offering clear career progression opportunities

42% are improving their employee benefits

32% are providing greater incentives and rewards

38% are providing more opportunities for flexible working

62% are investing in staff training and development

24% are upwardly revising salaries

30% are offering apprenticeships



*Bill Scobie,
managing
director
of Lingo
Telemarketing*

He said: "In our business, we are plagued by a cycle of boom and bust with regular recessions that drive qualified professionals to leave the sector and never come back. It is especially difficult recruiting good architects because the training takes a minimum of seven years and often nearer to nine years.

"This means that when qualified architects leave the profession out of necessity in a downturn and do not then return, the skills shortage is even worse when the economy begins to grow again.

"Our vision to be an outstanding built environment consultancy is displayed in all our studios. Some of the activities we undertake include a daily coffee break where all staff meet — for example, to share best practice ideas and make announcements."

Mr Waddy added: "Each year we organise a 'Practice Day' where all staff come together to discuss our work, the successes and challenges of the past year and how the business should develop in future. At least once a year we undertake a day of buildings visits either to view our own work or to experience other 'exemplar' built environment schemes.

"For us, Investors in People demonstrates how we value our team and include everyone in shaping the firm's business plan and direction of travel.

"For example, at one Practice Day, the team suggested we look into having a London

presence to tap into the market nearer to the capital.

"After careful research, we acquired Archadia Chartered Architects in Hampton which specialises in elderly care and special needs housing — a sector we identified as a growth market. Last year we formed a dedicated urban design team following the identification of several significant housing opportunities in Oxfordshire.

"All of this helps us recruit and retain staff in a challenging and costly environment. In relation to average earnings, Oxfordshire is one of the most expensive places to live in the UK. Employers need to have something to entice people to join them and IIP is one option."

Lingo Telemarketing

Managing director Bill Scobie — who joined Lingo Telemarketing as a temp and ended up buying the company — said: "As a B2B business development agency, mainly providing telemarketing services to healthcare oriented, professional services and educational sector clients, we need to have teams of experienced people who are capable of holding peer-to-peer conversations with our clients' prospective customers.

"This may involve discussing flu vaccine requirements with healthcare professionals in GP surgeries, arranging presentations to hospital consultants or surveying software

requirements within educational establishments. We have a core team of people, some of whom are part time to meet other requirements — such as childcare or managing a portfolio career — and we augment this team with new members who are taken on for specific projects.

"These are often experienced people who are looking for a short term assignment while they look for another permanent job.

"We accept, therefore, that they may need the odd few hours off to attend interviews and we are happy to facilitate this," Mr Scobie said.

"It might seem that this presents us with serious management problems — and it is not without its challenges. However, the benefits in terms of attracting well qualified people with substantial business experience far outweigh any drawbacks.

"It means that we have people who do not need micro-managing and also that our clients get a high level of service and we achieve the results they require. Also, I think we are giving something to our staff that is beneficial in allowing them to work in a way that suits their specific requirements.

"We have people who came to us for a one off project and then stay. I guess I am the ultimate example of this as I took a short term assignment with Lingo in 2009 and ended up buying the company in 2014 — but I guess the journey from temp to owner and managing director is rare!"

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

IS OXFORD CITY CENTRE IN DANGER OF BECOMING A 'DEAD ZONE' FOR GENERAL BUSINESS?

Oxford is bottom of the pile when it comes to choosing a business location, according to the findings of the latest Oxfordshire Business Barometer

Just ten per cent of business decision-makers surveyed said they would choose central Oxford as a location when they next moved premises. Instead, assuming an ideal world, the majority (42 per cent) said they would prefer to be based in an Oxfordshire town or village; 24 per cent would choose the Oxford ring road and another 24 per cent a business or science park.

Almost three-quarters taking part in the poll agreed that with much of the commercial property development and investment taking place outside of central Oxford, the city centre looks set to become even more dominated by the education and retail sectors — and a 'dead zone' for general business.

Andrew Hammond, Managing Director at Oxford Products in Witney, said: "I agree that the city centre is a dead zone for business, which for us is mainly down to the huge amount of time it takes to commute into the city centre.

"For some time now we have actively not used any professional service providers if we have had to travel into Oxford for face to face meetings, preferring to deal with out of town providers instead.

"Market towns are much easier to travel into and many of the local councils have understood that by providing free parking, it really does help to keep these small towns alive and kicking on all levels — retail, business and private.

"This also puts in danger the future of the retail side of Oxford city centre. Why spend an hour travelling into Oxford, then paying a fortune to park when you can find everything on your doorstep in Witney in minutes and have free parking too."

Almost eight years ago, Olivia Lane-Nott, Director at O Consultancy, relocated from London to Kings Sutton south of Banbury, where she believes she is ideally situated for her clients in Oxford, Milton Park, Northampton and London.

She explained: "From Kings Sutton, I can be on the M40 and A43 within about ten minutes, and use Banbury train station for my travel to London. Equally if I have an evening event, a drive into London is just as easy, parking either in

"From Kings Sutton, I can be on the M40 and A43 within about ten minutes, and use Banbury train station for my travel to London"

*Olivia Lane-Nott,
Director at O Consultancy,*



Westfield in Shepherd's Bush or in the centre.

"When I am not at my clients' premises and have all the information gleaned from my days with them, I work about one day a week from home, in a beautiful village setting, away from the hustle and bustle where I can draft, edit and proof all my PR and marketing material, and forward plan.

"I am very lucky to have the best of both

worlds, in such an accessible part of the country — and the best train line into London!"

However, Tim Reid, a solicitor in the property disputes team at Withy King based in central Oxford, says there are pros and cons to every location and believes the city centre still has a lot to offer.

He said: "It is not entirely surprising that businesses surveyed at this moment in time are swayed towards the space and convenience of business parks and semi-rural locations, given all the road works and city centre constraints. However, it is worth bearing in mind that Oxford is only months away from a new direct rail link from London Marylebone.

"The city centre could see a rise in demand from general business, particularly as many workers become increasingly drawn to urban living, office space adapts to the changes in technology and cloud based systems become more popular."

Mr Reid added: "The shortage of sizable office space in the city centre is undisputed but the tenants who do hold it may wish to evaluate the trends and the impact of the improved transport links before making any hasty moves. Brand Oxford is recognised internationally and will always be a major draw.

"Although many professional services firms

"The city centre could see a rise in demand from general business, particularly as office space adapts to the changes in technology"



Tim Reid, a solicitor in the property disputes team at Withy King

have already moved out of Oxford and are now enjoying the excellent facilities offered by many of the business parks, there are those such as Withy King and Critchleys, which choose to retain their central locations to the satisfaction of both their staff and clients."

LMC International, the leading independent economic and business consultancy for the global agribusiness sector, recently moved to new premises in Cornmarket Street, Oxford.

Chairman, Dr James Fry, explained why the company chose to remain in the city centre: "Our previous office was very nearby, in George Street, and staff had adapted where they lived and their travel plans to come into the city centre.

"Many of us, like me, do not own cars and cycle into work. This limits our willingness to work away from the city centre.

"Our staff travel a great deal. It is very convenient to be able to catch a train to London or a coach to Heathrow from the office.

"From a personal point of view, lacking a car makes shopping more of a daily task than is the case for some people," Dr Fry added.

"Having Gloucester Green market on a Wednesday and good supermarkets open every day in the city centre means that it is very convenient to shop before or after work and take things home on a bicycle. Having good theatres, museums, cinemas, concert facilities, and so on, in walking distance is a further bonus."

David Williams, a director at commercial property consultancy Meeson Williams Phillips based near

Oxford and at Milton Park, said: "The physical and historical constraints of Oxford's central business area has meant that the city only provided a limited amount of office stock, ranging from converted listed period buildings

to the most modern built in the early 2000s.

"The commercial heart of Oxford is about to experience one of the most radical periods of development taking in the Westgate Centre and West End areas, but how is this likely to affect the general office market?"

"Thinking back to when I started working in Oxford's commercial market in the late 1980s, there has always been a continuous demand for office space which has usually exceeded supply in terms of both quantity and office space being fit for purpose.

"In the last three years, Meeson Williams Phillips has worked with seven businesses specifically looking to acquire offices in the city centre with a cumulative floor space of 5,760 sq m (62,000 sq ft), which has been a challenge to fulfil," Mr Williams added.

"Apart from a limited choice of premises, being in the city centre brings other disadvantages, including a lack of car parking and traffic congestion.

"Despite this, many businesses still choose to be in Oxford, recognising the benefits of a city centre location in attracting staff, connecting them with clients or suppliers and providing easy access to public transport networks.

"Looking ahead, retaining businesses in the city centre is an essential part of keeping the city a vibrant and diverse micro economy," Mr Williams said.

"The new developments in Oxford are expected to deliver office accommodation and it is important that local businesses are made aware of the pipeline of new opportunities in order to forward plan three to five years ahead.

"The city will only ever be able to cater for a small proportion of business accommodation and it is likely that clusters will grow in existing sectors such as digital, research and media."

Philip Campbell, Head of Asset Management at MEPC Milton Park, added: "The new shopping offer at the Westgate Centre will be attractive for employees in Oxford and together with the upgrading of Oxford station will mean that

as business park owners, we have to ensure our offer is just as enticing.

"For us, it is about great travel connections and added retail offerings such as cafés, coffee houses, click and collect, pop up shops, and



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**David Williams,
Director at
Meeson Williams Phillips**



"The new shopping offer at the Westgate Centre will be attractive for employees in Oxford."

Philip Campbell, Head of Asset Management at MEPC Milton Park

also hotel accommodation and conferencing facilities.

"Being based on a business park offers different advantages in terms of networking, space, parking and amenities, and being part of the Government's Enterprise Zone. It also means qualifying companies can benefit from business rates' relief of up to £275,000 per organisation over five years.

"We have seen huge growth at Milton Park in the last 15 months, with more than 1,000 people and 50 more companies on the park since December 2013," Mr Campbell said.

"We are now at over 7,500 people and 250 companies. So these figures show that business and science parks are still in demand. But for those companies which opt for the city centre, it is because the product fits their business, and that will continue as we see further investment and development.

"Competition all over Oxfordshire is strong and it is about being fleet of foot, recognising where demand is coming from, and developing the right product to attract such companies to help them grow."



When you next move business premises, and in an ideal world, where would you most like to be based?

42% Oxfordshire town or village location

24% Business or science park

24% Oxford ring road (including Botley, Cowley and Kidlington)

10% Oxford city centre

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY 'DASHBOARD'

Total office, retail and industrial floor space on the market in Oxfordshire: 2,882,781 sq ft (267,817 sq m)

Down 98,258 sq ft (9,129 sq m) from December 2014

This supplement to the Oxfordshire Business Barometer has been created by Meeson Williams Phillips to monitor supply and demand in the county.

on the market, the 'dashboard' below will enable you to track availability by size, type and location.

It is based on data provided by 21 of Oxfordshire's commercial property agencies* in March 2015.

As well as giving the total amount of floor space

Location	Office	Industrial	Retail
OXFORD	414,569 (38,514) 45.7% 12.8% 22.8% 18.7%	239,847 (22,282) 35.7% 25% 21.4% 17.9%	19,761 (1,836) 100% 0% 0% 0%
WITNEY	100,169 (9,306) 64.7% 20.6% 8.8% 5.9%	233,081 (2,144) 34.5% 15.6% 21.8% 28.1%	13,043 (1,212) 100% 0% 0% 0%
DIDCOT	24,399 (2,267) 81.9% 18.1% 0% 0%	106,296 (9,875) 30% 10% 40% 20%	2,818 (262) 100% 0% 0% 0%
BICESTER	70,774 (6,575) 93.7% 0% 0% 6.3%	76,553 (7,112) 44.5% 11.1% 22.2% 22.2%	9,036 (839) 83.3% 16.7% 0% 0%
BANBURY	136,087 (12,643) 61.7% 8.8% 17.7% 5.8%	295,826 (27,483) 0% 20% 10% 70%	11,344 (1,054) 71.4% 28.6% 0% 0%
ABINGDON	352,284 (32,727) 55.1% 13.8% 20.7% 10.4%	526,986 (48,958) 14.3% 14.3% 9.5% 61.9%	664 (62) 100% 0% 0% 0%
CHIPPING NORTON	2,651 (246) 100% 0% 0% 0%	4,273 (397) 0% 100% 0% 0%	282 (26) 100% 0% 0% 0%
FARINGDON	0 (0) 0% 0% 0% 0%	0 0% 0% 0% 0%	0 0% 0% 0% 0%
HENLEY	13,855 (1,287) 77.8% 22.2% 0% 0%	15,091 (1,402) 0% 0% 0% 100%	1,624 (151) 100% 0% 0% 0%
THAME	19,739 (1,834) 81.8% 9.1% 9.1% 0%	91,852 (8,533) 62.5% 0% 0% 37.5%	2,887 (268) 100% 0% 0% 0%
WALLINGFORD	14,659 (1,362) 91% 0% 9.0% 0%	35,968 (3,342) 62.5% 0% 25% 12.5%	3,280 (305) 100% 0% 0% 0%
WANTAGE	19,314 (1,794) 25% 0% 50% 25%	22,394 (2,080) 33.3% 66.7% 0% 0%	1,375 (128) 100% 0% 0% 0%

Areas in sq ft (sq m). Availability % by number of buildings

Colour Key • 0 - 3,000 sq ft • 3,001 - 5,000 sq ft • 5,001 - 10,000 sq ft • 10,000+ sq ft

* Source: Based on data provided in March 2015 by 21 Oxfordshire-based, property agents. Contributors include Meeson Williams Phillips, Savills, MEPC Milton Park, Cluttons, White Commercial, Green & Co, Benedicts, Marriotts Oxford, Marriotts, Carroll & Partners, Berry Morris, Carter Jonas, LSH, VSL, Fields, Livingston Gunn, Adkin, Gilbert Walker, Parker Parr, Simmons and Sons, Stimpsons Eves



SIGNS OF PROGRESS AS NEW DEVELOPMENTS START TO GET UNDERWAY

During the first quarter of 2015, occupier demand has continued to move at a pace in all sectors, including office, industrial, R&D and retail. This has resulted in falls in the supply of offices, notably in Banbury, Abingdon, Wallingford and Wantage, and industrial stock in Didcot, Bicester, Banbury and Abingdon.

However, the cumulative amount of commercial floor space available has remained relatively constant with a total of 2,882,781 sq ft (267,817 sq m) available in Oxfordshire, only slightly down from the previous quarter, by 98,258 sq ft (9,129 sq m).

Large occupier acquisitions in the office and industrial sectors have been counter balanced by increases in supply, principally offices and industrial units in Oxford, Witney and Thame.

The focus of attention remains on bringing forward new development projects to fill the significant gaps in the market. Scanning down the 'dashboard' it is still clear to see the extreme

percentages which illustrate the continued concentrations in supply.

We are currently operating in a market place where occupiers and property developers are engaging directly with one another in pre-leasing or pre-sale agreements.

The forward planning of new premises is integral to the business development plan for companies in Oxfordshire.

The timeline for taking a site through the planning process and building costs are creating challenges for the delivery of new development sites for companies, which is a national rather than localised problem.

We will all have experienced the side effects of the improvements in infrastructure ongoing throughout the county, but the progress in new development and infrastructure is now clear to see which is positive for all.

*David Williams, Director, Meeson Williams Phillips
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Focus on North Oxfordshire

Chris White, managing director of White Commercial chartered surveyors based in Banbury, provides an overview of North Oxfordshire's booming property market

The Cherwell District and North Oxfordshire M40 Corridor have long been regarded as areas of growth and development opportunity since the opening of the London to Birmingham M40 Motorway in 1990.

This is in sharp contrast to South Oxfordshire where development control as opposed to economic development has generally been the 'order of the day' protecting and promoting Oxfordshire's important green belt and historical heritage.

In 2015 North Oxfordshire is seeing dramatic growth with a number of major commercial and residential developments planned and under way. A few highlights in the district include the following:

Central M40 Banbury:

British Airways Pension Fund and DBSymmetry is developing 1.6 million sq ft of new industrial and distribution buildings on 70 acres and fronting the M40. Pre-lets include a new high quality 120,000 sq. ft. building for Prodrive Motorsport which will be available for fit out in April.

A further new development of a 235,000 sq ft warehouse/industrial unit is also being built speculatively by the developers to meet growing occupier demand in the region.

Graven Hill Bicester MOD site:

The development by Cherwell District Council



of a 530 acre mixed residential and commercial scheme totalling over 1900 residential units, 80 per cent of which will be sold as self-build plots and 1.4 million sq. ft. of industrial/warehousing accommodation currently occupied by the MOD but to be partially redeveloped by 2019.

This is in addition to expansions of Bicester Village; a new Tesco Superstore and the development of the Eco Town.

Kärcher (Pressure Washers):

Kärcher are shortly to begin construction of their new 85,000 sq. ft. headquarters/office and training facility over-looking Junction 11 of the M40 motorway at Banbury.

The Entertainer (Toy Store):

The retailers are shortly to move into their new 250,000 sq. ft. warehouse and distribution facility with offices which is currently under construction at Banbury Cross Business Park.

Beaumont Business Park:

The new steel frames for two new industrial/warehouse units of 20,000 – 40,000 sq ft have just been erected on the Beaumont Industrial Estate completion of the new scheme is due in the middle of 2015.

Banbury Gateways 275,000 sq ft Retail Park:

This comprises a new high quality retail development currently under construction on Prodrive's former site overlooking the M40 anchored by Marks and Spencer's ninth largest out of town retail store in the country totalling 100,000 sq ft and Fat Face's largest store in the country at 60,000 sq. ft. Other retailers include Primark, NEXT Home and Fashion, McDonalds and Starbucks.

Further new retail developments in Banbury are likely to include a new Waitrose store on Southam Road together with a new out of town Costa Drive through currently under construction near the Holiday Inn Express at the junction of the M40. The Modern Landmark Hotel has recently been purchased by Premier Inn.

Shortages of supply of existing accommodation are already looming.

This will inevitably lead to an increase in rental and capital values which is good news for developers, landlords and investors but additional occupational costs for companies and occupiers.

SURVEY SIGNALS CONTINUING EMPLOYMENT GROWTH

An increasing number of Oxfordshire businesses are taking on new staff, reflecting the employment picture being painted in many other parts of the UK of growing demand and a rapidly diminishing pool of suitable job applicants. More than half the employers who responded to the latest Oxfordshire Business Barometer* have increased their headcounts over the last 12 months, another rise on the previous quarters.

Turnover has risen or remained the same for most respondents (92 per cent) while investment is on the cards for 88 per cent.

These findings come from a quarterly poll of Oxfordshire businesses conducted by law firm Withy King, recruitment consultancy Allen Associates and the Oxford Times' In Business magazine.

*Survey conducted in February and March 2015

TURNOVER



70% of the businesses surveyed saw an increase in turnover in the last 12 months

↓ down from **84%** in Q4 of 2014

↘ and slightly down from **74%** in Q3

IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2015



58% expected to see their turnover increase

→ in line with **55%** predicted in Q4 and up from **33%** predicted in Q3 of 2014

HEADCOUNT



54% of businesses increased their headcount in the last 12 months

↑ up from **48%** in Q4 of 2014

↑ and up from **31%** in Q3 of 2014

IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2015



48% expected to recruit

↑ up from **21%** predicted in Q4 and up from **33%** predicted for Q3 of 2014

INVESTMENT



88% planned to invest in their business in Q1, up significantly from **57%** in Q4 and Q3 of last year

Key areas for investment remain the same as in the previous quarter:



68% planned to invest in marketing and business development



20% in premises



32% in R&D



39% in software and hardware



55% in people

CONFIDENCE



56% of survey respondents are feeling more confident about their prospects for the first half of 2015, when compared to the same period last year. This is a lower rate than reported in 2014



38% said their confidence levels had remained the same