

Joint Oxfordshire Statement of Common Ground between

**Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council,
Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council**

Submission Draft (Regulation 19) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local Plan

December 2024



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**



Listening Learning Leading



1. Introduction

- 1.1 National planning policy emphasises the importance of local planning authorities working collaboratively on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries, which may include the provision of new homes, jobs and infrastructure.
- 1.2 Such joint working should be captured in a statement of common ground which is essentially a written record of the strategic matters that are being addressed and explaining where effective co-operation is and is not happening throughout the plan-making process.
- 1.3 A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) forms part of the evidence base which is needed to demonstrate that local planning authorities have complied with the Duty to Co-operate when local plans are considered at examination.
- 1.4 In terms of formal engagement to date, South and Vale has consulted on the Joint Local Plan at the following stages:
 - Joint Local Plan (JLP) at Regulation 18 Part 1 stage (June 2022)
 - Regulation 18 Part 2 stage (Jan 2024) and
 - the publication draft of the Joint Local Plan through Regulation 19 (Oct 2024).
- 1.5 All Oxfordshire Councils have engaged with the preparation of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) at all of these stages, in most cases through submission of formal responses.
- 1.6 The Councils recognise the value of an on-going working relationship for positively prepared local plans.

2. Purpose and scope of this Statement of Common Ground

- 2.1 This joint Oxfordshire SoCG has been prepared by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils in respect of key strategic matters for the JLP for agreement by Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council (“the Councils”) who are hereafter referred to as “the parties”.
- 2.2 This joint SoCG has been prepared specifically in relation to South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Regulation 19 submission draft Local Plan. It sets out key strategic matters that are agreed and some that are not between the parties in relation to the South and Vale Local Plan 2041 (“the Plan”).

- 2.3 Additional SoCG are being produced as bi-lateral statements on other strategic and cross boundary issues. District specific SoCG are intended to follow after submission of the JLP.
- 2.4 The SoCG has been prepared by South and Vale officers, discussed at the Oxfordshire Planning Policy Officers Group (OPPO) and has been agreed by the respective senior officer of each Council as reflected in the signatories below.
- 2.5 OPPO comprises the planning policy manager (or equivalent) from each Council and meets regularly, every month or every other month, to discuss plan-making, including strategic matters of cross boundary importance. Various mechanisms for cooperation exist, including regular partnership meetings and forums. These are set out in the South and Vale Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Cooperate October 2024¹.
- 2.6 This SoCG focuses on the following key strategic matters:
- Section 3 - Housing need and supply (including affordable housing, and the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers)
 - Section 4 - The supply of retail and employment land
 - Section 5 - Addressing Climate change
 - Section 6 - The provision of infrastructure, including health, education, utilities, flood risk and strategic sustainable transport links
 - Section 7 - Conserving and enhancing our natural and historic environments
 - Section 8 - Joint evidence base (for this SoCG specifically Habitats Regulations Assessment)
- 2.7 Under the key strategic matters headers, this SoCG outlines:
- **Matters of principle**, where the parties agree;
 - An outline of the **current position of the Local Planning Authorities (LPAs)**.
- 2.8 The matters of principle are key relevant principles established by national policy or they are principles taken from the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision² is a useful jointly agreed vision that would inform plan making in Oxfordshire.
- 3. Housing Need and supply (including affordable housing, and the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers)**

¹ [South and Vale Councils JLP Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Co-operate](#)

² [A Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire](#) (May 2021)

Matters of principle:

3.1 The parties agree the following:

- Housing need is a strategically important matter which has important cross-boundary implications for local plan-making;
- Housing need is an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed in an area and is the first step in deciding how many homes to plan for;
- The NPPF³ expects strategic policy-making authorities to follow the standard method for assessing local housing need. The standard method for assessing local housing need provides a minimum starting-point in determining the number of homes needed in an area.
- There may be exceptional circumstances which justify an alternative approach to assessing housing need. Any alternative approach should reflect current and future demographic trends and market signals;
- Any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for, and that this should inform Local Plan strategies where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- Plan-making authorities should assess the need for housing of different groups and reflect this in planning policies;
- Strategic policy-making authorities will need to estimate the current number of households and projected number of households who lack their own housing or who cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market;
- The NPPF at Paragraph 63 states ‘the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies’;
- An assessment of land availability identifies a future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic development uses over the plan period and is an important source of evidence to inform plan-making and decision-taking.

³ [National Planning Policy Framework](#) - NPPF (December 2023)

Current position of the LPAs:

- 3.2 The South and Vale JLP includes policies on the housing requirement (Policy HOU1 Housing requirement), affordable housing (Policy HOU3 Affordable housing), and meeting the needs of and safeguarding for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople (Policies HOU10 and HOU11).
- 3.3 South and Vale state that HOU1 sets a housing requirement which aligns with the standard method-based housing need, with an uplift to address the unmet need for Oxford that is in existing, adopted Local Plans. Those Local Plans were prepared in accordance with the duty to co-operate and the policies making provision towards Oxford's unmet needs were found to be sound. South and Vale present separate housing requirements in HOU1, reflecting that they have different mechanisms currently in South and Vale for addressing the already agreed unmet need figure from Oxford in the adopted Local Plans.
- 3.4 For South Oxfordshire, South and Vale state the housing requirement for the first 15 years of the plan period comprises the standard method housing need of 579 homes per year, plus an uplift of 330 homes a year to accommodate the agreed unmet need from Oxford. This takes the total to 909 homes a year for this period. After this, when the agreed unmet need period has completed, the housing requirement will equate to the standard method figure of 579 homes a year.
- 3.5 For the Vale of White Horse, South and Vale state the housing requirement for the first 10 years of the plan period comprises the standard method housing need of 633 homes per year with an uplift of 183 homes per year to accommodate the agreed unmet need from Oxford. The Vale of White Horse figure for unmet need is 2,200 homes to be delivered over the period 2019/20 to 2030/31. This equates to 183 homes per year, but the first of these two years fall before the start of the Joint Local Plan Period in 2021/22. The total requirement for the period 2021/22 to 2030/31 is therefore 816 homes per year. After this, it is proposed that when the agreed unmet need period has completed, the housing requirement will equate to the standard method figure of 633 homes a year.
- 3.6 The City Council continues to consider that the full unmet need established through the Oxford Local Plan 2036 and apportioned as set out in the agreed Memorandum of Understanding needs to be met by 2036 (as they state that none had been met prior to the base date of the plan). Vale considers that it has delivered some of this unmet need since 2019 and that the disagreement relates to a soundness matter.
- 3.7 On housing need, South and Vale state the South and Vale Joint Housing Needs Assessment accompanying the JLP was discussed at a bespoke

workshop on the methodology in April 2023 and subsequently engaged upon formally with the Parties at Regulation 18 (2) and Regulation 19 stages. On land supply, South and Vale state the HELAA does not present a constrained housing or employment supply. South and Vale state the JLP does not anticipate any unmet housing needs.

- 3.8 In relation to the amount of agreed unmet need accommodated in the JLP, South and Vale engaged in a joint Oxfordshire-wide process to determine the best distribution of that unmet need as part of the post 2014 Strategic Housing Market Assessment work programme. South and Vale accepted a significant quantum of unmet need (South Oxfordshire agreeing to accommodate 4,950 homes between 2021/21 and 2035/36, and Vale of White Horse agreeing to accommodate 2,200 homes between 2019/20 and 2030/3). These were accommodated in their adopted Local Plans in 2019 and 2020 respectively. The JLP plan period overlaps with the period for delivery of the agreed unmet need. South and Vale consider that they continue to reflect the agreed unmet need within the JLP and have embedded that need within the spatial strategy (Policy SP1). South and Vale have engaged with Oxford through development management pre-application and application stage discussions about edge of Oxford sites as they come forward and the establishment of a now functioning cross border housing allocations strategy. However, Oxford City Council consider that they have not been engaged by South and Vale on how the JLP deals with the unmet need which the City Council considers to be a failing of the Duty to Cooperate. South and Vale consider any outstanding matters concern soundness issues.
- 3.9 Oxford City Council and Cherwell District Council jointly commissioned housing need evidence in the form of the Oxfordshire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA) 2022 to inform their respective Local Plans. However, following the Oxford Local Plan Inspectors' letter Cherwell has withdrawn the HENA from its emerging evidence base and Oxford is considering next steps for its Local Plan.
- 3.10 South and Vale do not consider there is any new unmet housing need from any neighbouring authorities for the JLP to accommodate.
- 3.11 South and Vale state that a Joint Housing Needs Assessment (JHNA) is the South and Vale JLP evidence that justifies the policies for specific groups. The JHNA informs JLP policies HOU2 to HOU7.
- 3.12 South and Vale state that South and Vale's JHNA does not provide an alternative assessment of housing need for South and Vale. It uses the most recent 2018-based household projections but as applied to the ONS 2021 mid-year population estimates (instead of the 2014-based household projections used by the standard method) to forecast what the make-up of the population will be by 2041. South and Vale state the JHNA evidence

concludes that using the standard method as the basis of housing need will sufficiently accommodate demographic trends within their districts.

- 3.13 West Oxfordshire District Council has commissioned a local housing needs assessment to inform its emerging Local Plan to 2041. That work currently remains ongoing pending anticipated revisions to national policy. West Oxfordshire note the approach being taken towards housing need and housing provision in the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse JLP and consider it a matter for the Councils to substantiate during the examination hearings.
- 3.14 South and Vale state, for Gypsies and Travellers, an Oxfordshire-wide Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment is what the JLP uses to evidence needs for the travelling community, which has then been interpreted and expressed in policy HOU10 and also has been interpreted and used to evidence the approach to safeguarding in policy HOU11.
- 3.15 All Oxfordshire local authorities decided in autumn 2022 to commission a joint Oxfordshire-wide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). This was completed in December 2024.
- 3.16 South and Vale have continued the approach in the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan in the JLP in policy HOU10 of accommodating the needs of Gypsies and Travellers on select strategic allocations. Oxford City Council do not agree with extending this to strategic sites near Oxford.

4. The supply of retail and employment land

Matters of principle:

- 4.1 The parties agree the following:
 - Strategic policy-making authorities will need to prepare a robust evidence base to understand existing business needs, which will need to be kept under review to reflect local circumstances and market conditions;
 - Oxfordshire Strategic Vision has two relevant aims for the economy which are to 'Support diverse, accessible employment, generating a highly productive and inclusive economy based on our world-class research, innovation and technology' and to 'Embrace innovation based on our technology sectors and knowledge-intensive activity, and develop new innovative solutions for working, learning, mobility, health care, resource management, sustainable design and improved public services'.

Current position of the LPAs:

- 4.2 Through OPPO, Oxfordshire authorities and OxLEP (now part of the County Council) had a conversation at the meeting on 7 February 2024 about the specific issue of Community Employment Plans and how to take this matter forward in our respective Plans. Similarly, there was a presentation and discussion on the Circular Economy in Oxfordshire at OPPO on 8 March 2024.
- 4.3 South and Vale state the employment need requirements in South and Vale are established by the Employment Land Needs Assessment (ELNA). South and Vales position in the JLP is that the sector requirements that are evidenced in the ELNA can be met within South and Vale with no unmet needs. The spatial strategy in the JLP at Policy SP1 reflects a focus of development at Science Vale.
- 4.4 South and Vale state the JLP expresses that the supply of employment land and premises exceeds the projected future demand for employment, but that there are no significant new employment allocations. South and Vale do not consider any duty to co-operate issues arise from the ELNA or the JLP's employment strategy. Oxford City Council consider that they were not engaged by South and Vale on the matter of the employment strategy or supply of the JLP, which it does consider are matters with potentially significant cross-boundary impacts.

5. Addressing Climate change

Matters of principle:

- 5.1 The parties agree the following:
- Addressing climate change is one of the core land use planning principles which the National Planning Policy Framework expects to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking;
 - Oxfordshire Strategic Vision has two aims for addressing climate change which are to 'have achieved carbon neutral status, and be accelerating towards a carbon negative future, removing more carbon than it emits each year. Energy production will be sustainable' and to 'Be clean and green, placing the county at the leading edge of UK and global de-carbonisation efforts by maximising all opportunities to significantly reduce Oxfordshire's carbon footprint, and increasing natural capital across the county.'

Current position of the LPAs:

- 5.2 All parties engaged with the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PAZCO). PAZCO was published in 2021 and prepared and funded with consortium of key stakeholders in Oxfordshire including the Local Authorities, with the aim of examining how Oxfordshire can sustain the momentum of the last decade to achieve net-zero emissions. Taking the PAZCO recommendations into account, South and Vale state that Policy CE5 of the JLP identifies potentially suitable locations for a range of types of renewable schemes.
- 5.3 The Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan was completed in 2022 with input from all parties. This helped to inform the Oxfordshire authorities with actions including a recommendation (Action 6) to share and reflect on information and advice and share knowledge in the preparation of local plans and delivery of net zero carbon policies, which all parties engage upon at OPPO. In July 2024 the leaders of Oxfordshire councils agreed to commission the development of a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and an ongoing LAEP function for Oxfordshire. A memorandum of understanding is currently being agreed.
- 6. The provision of infrastructure, including health, education, utilities, flood risk and strategic sustainable transport links**

Matters of principle:

- 6.1 The parties agree the following:
- Effective cooperation enables strategic policy-making authorities and infrastructure providers to establish whether additional strategic cross-boundary infrastructure is required.

Current position of the LPAs:

Infrastructure

- 6.2 The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) was commissioned by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in 2017, involving the county's six local authorities and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, intending to help prioritise our infrastructure requirements, projects and investments, to inform Local Plans to 2040 and beyond. The Parties were involved in the initial stages of OxIS and continue to work together on the next stage of OxIS which has been commissioned through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

Health

- 6.3 An Oxfordshire Health Impact Assessment Toolkit was approved by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in January 2021 for use by all six Oxfordshire Local Authorities. A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a tool used to identify the health impacts of a plan or project and to develop recommendations to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts, while maintaining a focus on addressing health inequalities. By bringing such health considerations to the fore, HIAs add value to the planning process.
- 6.4 The parties all regularly attend an Oxfordshire based Healthy Place Shaping working group which South and Vale state has helped shape the approach taken in the plans including the JLP (Policy HP1).
- 6.5 The parties acknowledge that the JLP is accompanied by a Health Impact Assessment which South and Vale state is informed by the approach jointly agreed in the Oxfordshire HIA Toolkit, which has influenced the policy content of the JLP.

7. Conserving and enhancing our natural and historic environments

Matters of principle:

- 7.1 The parties agree the following:
- Oxfordshire Strategic Vision has three aims related to enhancing our natural and historic environments which are to 'Facilitate environmental improvements and make efficient use of Oxfordshire's natural resources and land'; to 'Enhance and expand access to the county's internationally significant historic environment and cultural and heritage assets'; and to 'Expect high-quality development which will have a positive impact on communities in terms of design, energy and water efficiency and public realm, utilises low-impact building and construction methods and materials, and is properly supported by the necessary infrastructure including excellent digital connectivity. Everything we build or design in Oxfordshire will be fit for purpose in the world of 2050, respond to different circumstances, contribute to Oxfordshire's sense of distinctiveness and rich variety, and support connected communities'.

Current position of the LPAs:

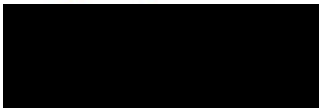
- 7.2 South and Vale state that the JLP is informed by a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment process.
- 7.3 All of the Oxfordshire authorities are part of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership which is working to delivery nature's recovery across the county.

7.4 All the authorities have a statutory role and are working collaboratively to produce the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, due to be published in summer 2025.

Habitats Regulation Assessment

- 8.1 The Parties are not preparing a joint Habitats Regulation Assessment; however we have engaged in seeking to align approaches to help determine the potential cumulative effects of growth from our local plans.
- 8.2 Through OPPO and officer-led meetings with those responsible for District level HRAs, work has been undertaken with regards to the cumulative impacts of development in all our adopted plans.
- 8.3 There is no available Oxfordshire-wide transport model which could be used to test all Oxfordshire Plans. All parties worked together to develop an explanatory note setting out a joint approach to in-combination effects. Each party has engaged with Natural England and all parties are committed to continued effective engagement going forward.

Signed on behalf of Cherwell District Council:



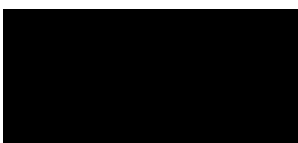
Christina Cherry
Planning Policy, Conservation and Design Manager
Date: 6 December 2024

Signed on behalf of Oxford City Council:



David Butler
Head of Planning and Regulatory Services
Date: 6 December 2024

Signed on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council:



Tim Oruye
Head of Policy and Programmes
Date: 9 December 2024

Signed on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council:



Chris Hargraves

Head of Planning

Date: 6 December 2024