

## Statement of Common Ground

between

**South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils**

and

**Reading Borough Council**

**In relation to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan  
and the Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update 2023-2041**

**December 2024**



Listening Learning Leading



## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This Statement of Common Ground has been prepared by South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (“South and Vale”) and Reading Borough Council (“Reading BC”) hereafter referred to as “the parties”. It sets out matters that are agreed between the parties in relation to the preparation of the following emerging plans:

- Joint Local Plan, Pre-submission publication version (Regulation 19), South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, October 2024
- Reading Borough Local Plan Update 2023 - 2041, Pre-Submission Draft.

## **2. Strategic Geography and Plan Making History**

2.1 South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts cover the most southern parts of the county of Oxfordshire. Covering a combined total area of 125,712 hectares, South and Vale incorporates the towns of Henley on Thames, Wallingford, Didcot, Thame, Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage.

2.2 Reading Borough adjoins South Oxfordshire to the South of the District. It covers 4,030 hectares and consists of the core part of the urban area of Reading. Reading also shares boundaries with the local authority areas of Wokingham and West Berkshire.

2.3 The boundary between the authorities does not follow precise physical features but lies to the north of the town of Reading, in close proximity to the residential areas of Emmer Green, and Caversham. It broadly follows the edge of the Reading urban area.

2.4 The parties have both reached the Regulation 19 stage of their respective plan making processes.

## **3. Local Plan Positions**

### *Reading BC*

3.1 The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. A review of the Local Plan was carried out in March 2023 which concluded that there is a need to undertake a Partial Update. A Consultation on Scope and Content (under Regulation 18) was carried out between November 2023 and January 2024.

3.2 Reading BC invited representations on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update between 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and 18<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State after full consideration of the representations received, timetabled for the end of February 2025. The plan is intended to be examined against the December 2023 NPPF, as enabled by the 2024 NPPF draft transitional arrangements.

### *South and Vale Joint Local Plan*

3.3 South and Vale commenced the evidence gathering process for its Joint Local Plan in 2021. A document seeking views on the issues that the Local Plan should cover was issued in 2022 and a Regulation 18 Preferred Options consultation was undertaken in early 2024.

3.4 Feedback from the earlier stages of the plan making process and the conclusions of all the completed evidence base documents were used to prepare the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Publication version, which was published for comment on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 until 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

3.5 South and Vale have submitted the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission version of the plan after full consideration of all representations received. The plan is intended to be examined against the December 2023 NPPF, as enabled by the 2024 NPPF transitional arrangements.

### *Duty to co-operate*

3.6 The parties agree that the processes for the South and Vale Joint Local Plan and the Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update have complied with the duty to co-operate insofar as it relates to cross-boundary matters between South and Vale and Reading.

## **4. Key Strategic Matters**

### ***Engagement on strategic cross boundary matters***

4.1 The parties have engaged to discuss relevant strategic cross boundary matters throughout the preparation of their respective plans. This has included engagement on the various evidence base documents which underpin emerging policies.

4.2 The duty to cooperate activities between the parties are recorded in the following documents:

- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Duty to Cooperate Statement: Joint Local Plan Pre-Submission Publication Version (Regulation 19) (December 2024).
- Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update - Duty to Cooperate Statement (November 2024, to be updated prior to submission).

4.3 The relevant strategic cross boundary matters between the parties are as follows:

- Housing need and supply (including affordable housing and the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers);
- The supply of retail and employment land; and
- The provision of infrastructure, including health, education, utilities, flood risk and strategic sustainable transport links.

## ***Housing need and supply (including affordable housing and the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers)***

### *Reading BC*

4.4 Reading BC has produced a Housing Needs Assessment (2024) to support the Partial Update. Exceptional circumstances have been identified for basing the plan on an alternative approach to the standard method. A Housing Needs Assessment has identified a local housing need of 735 homes per year. This figure is based on an alternative calculation to the Government's standard method. The calculation of the housing need is set out in the Reading Local Housing Needs Assessment: Report of Findings (July 2024) and the exceptional circumstances for departing from the standard method are set out in the Housing Provision Background Paper (November 2024).

4.5 The published Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment confirms that the identified need will be met in full and that Reading BC will deliver 825 homes per year over that period.

4.6 The local housing need figure for Reading BC calculated using the Government's standard method is 878 homes per annum. As set out above, the Partial Update is based on an alternative calculation due to exceptional circumstances, but on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023, Reading BC wrote to all local planning authorities within 10 km radius of the Borough boundary to scope out the potential to accommodate unmet need if the Partial Update to Local Plan were to be based on the alternative outcome of the standard methodology. This unmet need would amount to 954 homes over the plan period to 2041.

4.7 South and Vale responded to this request by noting that it would be premature to engage on this matter as work on Joint Local Plan has not made any provision for meeting unmet needs from Reading as discussions had been on the basis of Reading meeting its own needs, and that there should be a joint exploration of alternatives before any such provision would be made.

4.8 Reading BC's adopted plan also identifies requirements to meet the need for Gypsy and Traveller Pitches and sites for Travelling Showpeople, and this policy is not amended as part of the Partial Update. Reading BC has gone through a thorough site assessment process, which culminated in a consultation on Gypsy and Traveller provision during September and October 2017. The conclusion was that there were no sites that could meet the permanent or transit accommodation needs.

4.9 Reading BC continues to explore with its neighbours whether there are options for meeting the permanent need outside the Borough. A transit site has been granted planning permission within Reading that would meet the identified transit needs, and transit needs would not be expected to be met outside Reading in any case.

4.10 In terms of travelling showpeople, the small need identified is unlikely to be able to support a new site on its own and therefore any proposal for expansion of the existing site will need to be considered on its merits.

### *South and Vale*

4.11 The Joint Local Plan identifies a housing requirement of 31,020 units (16,530 for South Oxfordshire and 14,490 for Vale of White Horse). South and Vale is proposing to bring forward a supply of 39,757 homes over the plan period 2021-2041 (19,978 in South Oxfordshire and 19,779 in Vale of White Horse).

4.12 The proposed supply will exceed the identified housing requirement over the plan period. In addition to meeting its own needs, South and Vale are proposing to meet a proportion of the total unmet housing need identified in the adopted Local Plan for Oxford City. The plan continues to make provision for this, with an additional 4,950 homes for South Oxfordshire, and 1,830 homes for Vale of White Horse.

4.13 The spatial strategy contained within Policy SP1 proposes to meet a large proportion of the housing requirement through the provision of new garden communities at Didcot, Berinsfield and Dalton Barracks and a focus for growth at 'Science Vale'. New development will be supported on well-located brownfield sites in sustainable locations. The spatial strategy does not propose the release of Green Belt land to meet development needs.

### *Summary*

4.14 Policies in the parties' respective emerging Local Plans reflect the conclusions of the relevant latest calculation of housing need and both Plans propose to fully meet this need. There is no expectation of unmet need needing to be planned for by neighbouring local authorities.

4.15 Policies in the parties respective emerging local plans reflect the conclusions of the latest assessment for Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision. There is no expectation of unmet need needing to be planned for by South and Vale to neighbouring local authorities. There is an existing unmet need for permanent pitches arising from Reading that is unaltered by the Partial Update which Reading BC continues to seek to work with all neighbouring authorities on to identify opportunities.

### ***The supply of retail and employment land***

#### *Reading BC*

4.16 Reading BC identifies the need for additional office and industrial floorspace over the plan period in policy EM1 of its emerging local plan. The capacity identified through the HELAA and other evidence indicates that these needs can be met and Reading BC is not seeking to accommodate any unmet employment need in neighbouring authorities nor has it any space capacity to meet the unmet need of its neighbours. Policies relating to retail floorspace reflect the conclusions of the latest

relevant evidence and no significant need arises that would need to be met inside or outside Reading Borough.

### *South and Vale*

4.17 South Oxfordshire has a need for 25.8 hectares of employment land to meet employment needs over the plan period, and Vale of White Horse has a need for 113.2 hectares. This will be met through various supply sources and site allocations. The emerging plan identifies a supply 35.34 hectares in South Oxfordshire and 277.88 hectares in Vale of White Horse to meet employment needs. Policies relating to retail floorspace reflect the conclusions of the latest relevant evidence. South and Vale are not seeking to accommodate any unmet employment need in neighbouring authorities.

### ***The provision of infrastructure, including health, education, utilities, flood risk and strategic sustainable transport links***

#### *Reading BC*

4.18 Section 10.3 of the emerging Reading Local Plan and the associated Table 10.2 provide a summary of the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the items that are required to support planned growth. Table 10.2 identifies the Third Thames Crossing, as an alternative north-south route across the River Thames via a new road, public transport and active travel bridge and associated mitigation measures on the road network. Table 10.2 also identifies a series of Park and Ride Mobility Hubs, which as set out in relation to the transport policies would likely require land outside Reading, and corridors where these hubs would be proposed include three routes crossing the boundary with South Oxfordshire, although no sites are identified.

#### *South and Vale*

4.19 South and Vale's Local Plan does not refer to the Third Thames Crossing and land is not safeguarded to accommodate the crossing. At this stage, South and Vale consider the proposal is not deliverable. Oxfordshire County Councils' approach to Mobility Hubs does not appear to align with Reading BCs approach to Park and Ride Mobility Hubs, further work is needed to understand how these hubs could reduce car dependency and effective use of land thus land is not safeguarded for these schemes in the JLP. 4.20 South and Vale and Reading BC have prepared Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDPs) to identify infrastructure needs arising from planned growth. These important documents reflect all aspects of infrastructure need relating to those plans. The parties do not expect growth identified in their respective local plans to generate additional needs for community infrastructure (school places and healthcare facilities) in adjoining authorities.

## **5. Areas of Agreement**

5.1 The parties have engaged effectively and on an on-going basis during the plan making process. The respective local plans propose to make provision to fully meet the evidenced identified development needs unless otherwise stated in this Statement.

5.2 The parties agree that the evidence supporting the respective plans is robust and proportionate.

5.3 Policies in the respective plans reflect the climate emergency declared by South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Reading BC.

5.4 There may be opportunities for green infrastructure, walking/cycling linkages/, including those identified in green infrastructure evidence and active travel strategies. Further advancing of such opportunities responds to the issue of tackling the climate emergency.

5.5 Necessary engagement in relation to the respective plans will continue for some 'live' aspects of the evidence, such as GTAA and Infrastructure Delivery Plans.


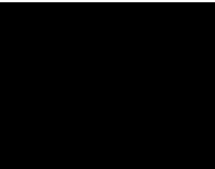
## 6. Governance Arrangements Including Future Review

6.1 The parties agree to:

- Keep a dialogue open on matters arising which are likely to have significant impacts and implications for the delivery of local plan policies;
- To review and update this Statement of Common Ground in the light of any material change in circumstances; and
- To maintain positive principles of cooperation.

## 7. Signatories

7.1 We confirm that the information in this Statement of Common Ground reflects the joint working to address identified strategic matters that has been undertaken between South and Vale and Reading BC. The parties will continue to work together to address cross boundary issues.

<b>On behalf of Reading Borough Council</b>	<b>On behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils</b>
James Crosbie	Tim Oruye
Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection	Head of Policy and Programmes
	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>09 December 2024</b>	<b>09 December 2024</b>