

Statement of Common Ground

between

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

and

Wokingham Borough Council

**In relation to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan
and the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040**

December 2024



Listening Learning Leading



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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 Wokingham Borough Council (“Wokingham 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
- Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 - 2040, Proposed Submission Plan

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, between the local authority areas of Buckinghamshire Council in the east and Swindon Borough in the west. 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 Wokingham Borough is located approximately 50km west of London, in the heart of the Thames Valley and within the Royal County of Berkshire. The borough covers an area of 17,892 hectares and is characterised by a variety of settlements with the largest being Earley, Winnersh and Woodley, which are in proximity to Reading Borough, and Wokingham.

2.3 South Oxfordshire District and Wokingham Borough are neighbouring local authorities sharing a boundary along the River Thames between Woodley (in Wokingham BC) and Henley (in South Oxfordshire District).

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

3. Local Plan Positions

Wokingham BC

3.1 Wokingham BC commenced evidence gathering to inform the Local Plan Update in 2016. The plan-making process has been informed by opinions expressed through various consultations, including an Issues and Options Consultation (2016), Homes for the Future Consultation (2018), Draft Plan Consultation (2020) and Revised Growth Strategy Consultation (2021). A wide range of technical reports have also been completed, including reports relating to sustainability, landscape character, transport, flood risk, air quality, housing, economic and retail needs, and land supply.

3.2 Wokingham BC invited representations on the Local Plan Update Proposed Submission Plan between 30th September and 13th November 2024. The plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State after full consideration of the representations received. The plan is intended to be examined against the December 2023 NPPF, as enabled by the 2024 NPPF transitional arrangements.

South and Vale

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 1st October 2024 until 12th November 2024. The Publication period aligns closely with the Wokingham BC's Local Plan document.

3.5 South and Vale will submit 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.

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) (October 2024).
- Wokingham Borough Council Duty to Cooperate Interim Statement of Compliance (September 2024).

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)

Wokingham BC

4.4 The local housing need figure for Wokingham BC, as set by the Government's standard method, is 748 dwellings per year at 1 April 2024 and 795 dwellings at 1 April 2023. Housing need over the plan period 2023-2040 equates to 12,763 dwellings as set out in Policy SS10.

4.5 This approach enables a land supply capable of providing as a minimum 13,955 dwellings within the plan period, meeting local housing need plus a reasonable allowance for potential non-delivery. This leaves no unmet need to be accommodated elsewhere.

4.6 The proposed spatial strategy set out in Policy SS2 proposes to meet a large proportion of the housing requirement through the evolution of the existing planned developments at the Arborfield Green, and South Wokingham Strategic Development Locations, and the delivery of a new sustainable garden village on land between Shinfield, Sindlesham and Arborfield. None of these locations are in proximity to the boundary between Wokingham Borough and South Oxfordshire District.

4.7 The need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches is proposed to be primarily met through a combination of specific site allocations and delivery as part of strategic scale development. The remaining need is expected to be met through windfall developments, for which a positive framework is set by Policies H9 and H10.

4.8 Wokingham BC is not looking to accommodate any unmet needs in neighbouring local authorities.

South and Vale

4.9 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).

4.10 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.

4.11 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.

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

4.13 Similarly, 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 neighbouring local authorities.

The supply of retail and employment land

Wokingham BC

4.14 Wokingham BC identifies the need for additional office and industrial floorspace over the plan period in Table 3 of its local plan. These needs can be delivered over the plan period and Wokingham BC is not seeking to accommodate any unmet need in neighbouring authorities. Policies relating to retail floorspace reflect the conclusions of the latest relevant evidence and are expected to be met within Wokingham Borough.

South and Vale

4.15 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 proposed 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.

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

4.16 Policy SS16 of Wokingham BC's local plan safeguards land for a potential Third Thames Crossing at Thames Valley Park Drive/A3290. Paragraph 5.128 notes that the achievement of the Third Thames Crossing project would involve land outside of the borough within the administrative boundary of South Oxfordshire District where a potential bridge would be required to land. It is acknowledged that at present there is no deliverable proposal and that a further business case and assessment of impacts would need to be completed before any proposal could be considered.

4.17 In the absence of a business case, South and Vale has not safeguarded land to accommodate the crossing. It is agreed that at this stage, the proposal is not deliverable.

4.18 South and Vale and Wokingham BC have prepared Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDPs) to identify infrastructure needs arising from planned growth. These important documents reflect all aspects of infrastructure need. 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 make provision to fully meet development needs and there are no unmet needs to be accommodated in neighbouring local authority areas.

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 Wokingham BC.

5.4 There will likely be opportunities for green infrastructure, walking/cycling linkages/routes across authority boundaries, 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 up to the point of submission. Relevant engagement will continue beyond submission for some 'live' aspects of the evidence, such as GTAA and Infrastructure Delivery Plans.

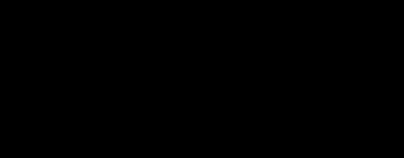

6. Governance Arrangements Including Future Review

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 Wokingham BC. The parties will continue to work together to address cross boundary issues.

On behalf of Wokingham Borough Council	On behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils
Trevor Saunders	Tim Oruye
Assistant Director, Planning	Head of Policy and Programmes
	
Date	
09/12/2024	09/12/2024