

# SPATIAL STRATEGY

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse  
**Joint Local Plan 2041**  
EXAMINATION LIBRARY DOCUMENT  
**TOP08.2**

## Joint Local Plan

Pre-submission Publication Version

(Regulation 19)



This topic paper supports the Joint Local Plan 2041.

We have prepared topic papers to present a coordinated view of the evidence that has been considered in drafting the Joint Local Plan 2041. We hope this will make it easier to understand how we have reached our position.

### **Publication history**

This topic paper was first published in January 2024, and was updated in October 2024 and released with the Regulation 19 publication version of the Joint Local Plan.

This December 2024 version contains the following updates since the October 2024 version:

- Update to Section 3 to reflect the Sustainability Appraisal outcomes for the spatial options testing in more detail.
- Update to Section 4 in response to Regulation 19 representations about Policy SP1 alternatives. This includes more detail about the considerations that the spatial strategy development gave to the context of the Joint Local Plan, including need figures and options for meeting Oxford's unmet housing need.

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# Section 1: Introduction and background

- 1.1 This Topic Paper is one of a series of papers supporting South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse's Joint Local Plan (JLP) Publication. The Topic Papers provide supporting information showing how the JLP has been shaped. Where relevant, the topic paper highlights national and local guidance to explain how the various plan-making requirements have been addressed and how they have influenced the JLP.
- 1.2 Topic Papers do not contain any policies, proposals, site allocations or new evidence and should be read as explanatory supporting documents.
- 1.3 We have prepared this topic paper to explain what we have considered in drafting the spatial strategy, and we aim to make it easier to understand how we have reached our current position. There are also consultation statements following both Regulation 18 consultations which explain how the strategy has responded to comments received.
- 1.4 The spatial strategy is an important policy at the heart of the plan. It sets out clearly where new development will be promoted and where it will be limited. We have been guided by the vision and objectives in Chapter 3 of the Joint Local Plan.
- 1.5 The Joint Local Plan covers the whole geography of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. The spatial strategy therefore involves establishing an overall strategy for where to locate and focus development across this plan area, while ensuring that each council meets its own housing requirements.
- 1.6 This topic paper is structured as follows:
  - Policy review** of relevant things a spatial strategy should take into account;
  - Evidence review** of relevant evidence relied up to develop the strategy presented by distinct topics;
  - Policy options** review of alternatives available and why they were not chosen;
  - a **Conclusion**.

# Section 2: Policy review

## National Policy

- 2.1 When preparing our spatial strategy, we must take into account the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2023) and any technical guidance on how to apply these in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). In this section we explain which parts of national policy cover the spatial distribution or pattern of development across a local plan's area.
- 2.2 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF says that achieving sustainable development requires the planning system to have the three overarching objectives of environmental, economic and social sustainability, which are interdependent and mutually supportive. Relevant to the spatial strategy, the 'social' objective highlights the importance of supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations. It notes that this can be secured by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health social and cultural well-being. Paragraph 16 of the NPPF makes it clear that plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, and then includes a footnote referring to this being a legal requirement of local planning authorities exercising their plan-making functions (section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 2.3 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF says planning policies should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable locations, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.
- 2.4 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Local Plans should apply the presumption positively throughout their preparation. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states:

*"Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For **plan-making** this means that:*

- a) *all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;*

- b) *strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:*
  - i. *the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area; or*
  - ii. *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”*

2.5 Paragraph 15 of the NPPF is relevant context for the spatial strategy, it states:

*“The planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for meeting housing needs and addressing other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.”*

2.6 It is paragraph 17 of the NPPF which states:

*“The development plan must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority’s priorities for the development and use of land in its area.”*

2.7 Set out in paragraph 20 of the NPPF is the requirement for strategic policies to:

*“set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking), and make sufficient provision for:*

- a) *housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;*
- b) *infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);*
- c) *community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and*
- d) *conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.”*

2.8 Paragraph 23 of the NPPF states:

*“broad locations for development should be indicated on a key diagram, and land-use designations and allocations identified on a policies map. Strategic policies should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, and at a sufficient rate, to address objectively assessed needs over the plan period, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This should include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (except insofar as these needs can be demonstrated to be met more appropriately through other mechanisms, such as brownfield registers or nonstrategic policies)”.*

- 2.9 Paragraph 26 of the NPPF describes effective on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies as integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. Joint working should help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary, and whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area could be met elsewhere.
- 2.10 The Localism Act 2011 places a statutory duty (the duty to cooperate) on councils when preparing local plans, and this duty remains in place at the point of the Publication JLP. The duty to cooperate requires local planning authorities to work constructively with neighbouring authorities and other prescribed bodies in preparing development plan documents. The duty to cooperate was intended to be repealed and replaced with a more flexible alignment test set out in national policy. The December 2023 NPPF did not publish this test and it still refers to the duty to cooperate. There was also no indication of a removal of the duty with the July 2024 NPPF consultation.
- 2.11 The spatial strategy can be one of the main policies in the Joint Plan where strategic matters of cross-boundary importance, like unmet housing need, is dealt with. We need to engage closely with others to ensure we deal with any strategic issues and to ensure they are fully considered in our plan-making.
- 2.12 Paragraph 74 of the NPPF in relation to achieving housing supply by planning for larger scale development states:

*“...Working with the support of their communities, and with other authorities if appropriate, strategic policy-making authorities should identify suitable locations for such development where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way. In doing so, they should:*

- a) consider the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, the area’s economic potential and the scope for net environmental gains;*
- b) ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the*

- development itself (without expecting an unrealistic level of self-containment), or in larger towns to which there is good access;*
- c) *set clear expectations for the quality of the places to be created and how this can be maintained (such as by following Garden City principles); and ensure that appropriate tools such as masterplans and design guides or codes are used to secure a variety of well-designed and beautiful homes to meet the needs of different groups in the community;*
  - d) *make a realistic assessment of likely rates of delivery, given the lead-in times for large scale sites, and identify opportunities for supporting rapid implementation (such as through joint ventures or locally-led development corporations); and*
  - e) *consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining new developments of significant size”.*

2.13 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF advises that planning policies should enable the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural building, public houses and places of worship.

2.14 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF in relation to promoting sustainable transport states:

*“The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making”.*

2.15 Also, the NPPF paragraph 110 explains that:

*“Planning policies should a) support an appropriate mix of uses across an area, and within larger scale sites, to minimise the number and length of journeys needed for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities;”*

2.16 Paragraph 123 also stresses that plans should aim to make effective use of land, making as much use as possible of previously developed or brownfield land.



## **Section 3: Evidence**

- 3.1 We have considered many issues when developing the spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan. The evidence provides context to explain how options as reasonable alternatives were formed, and ultimately why the Councils have decided that the spatial strategy preferred option presented in the Joint Local Plan Preferred Options, and featuring in the Publication JLP, is fully justified.

### **Previous Spatial Strategies**

- 3.2 In considering the new spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan, it is important to consider the current adopted spatial strategies. Principally for three reasons:
1. To understand if they are operating successfully,
  2. To acknowledge that they will be in place and still relevant for the earlier periods of the part of the JLP as they have identified significant levels of growth that is starting to take place now, and
  3. To understand the similarities and differences between the two Council's strategies.
- 3.3 We have looked at these points in turn below.
- 3.4 The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (adopted December 2020) spatial strategy was presented in Policy STRAT1:

## Policy STRAT1: The Overall Strategy

1. **Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire will be assessed using national policy and guidance and the whole of the Development Plan\* and should be consistent with the overall strategy of:**
  - i) **focusing major new development in Science Vale including sustainable growth at Didcot Garden Town and Culham so that this area can play an enhanced role in providing homes, jobs and services with improved transport connectivity;**
  - ii) **providing strategic allocations at Chalgrove, Culham, Berinsfield, Grenoble Road, Northfield, North of Bayswater Brook and Wheatley including necessary infrastructure and community facilities;**
  - iii) **close working with partner agencies, neighbouring local authorities, communities and other stakeholders to ensure the timely delivery of our strategy, which will deliver a significant amount of growth beyond the end of the plan period;**
  - iv) **supporting and enhancing the economic and social dependencies between our towns and villages;**
  - v) **supporting the roles of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford by maintaining and improving the attractiveness of their town centres through measures that include environmental improvements and mixed-use developments and by providing new homes, jobs, services and infrastructure;**
  - vi) **meeting unmet housing needs of Oxford City on strategic allocations adjacent to the boundary of Oxford near to where that need arises;**
  - vii) **supporting and enhancing the roles of the Larger Villages of Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring-on-Thames, Nettlebed, Sonning Common,**

- Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres;**
- viii) supporting Smaller and Other Villages by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services;**
  - ix) protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the two AONBs and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside of the towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment;**
  - x) supporting and enhancing our historic environment; and**
  - xi) contributing to tackling climate change.**

\*The Development Plan is outlined in paragraph 1.12

This policy contributes towards achieving objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 8.

3.5 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 (Part 1 adopted October 2016) spatial strategy was spread across three core policies:

- Core Policy 3: Settlement Hierarchy – which classified the settlements in the Vale of White Horse according to their role and function
- Core Policy 4: Meeting our Housing Need – which specified the scale and location of new housing, ensuring development was built in the most appropriate locations
- Core Policy 5: Housing Supply Ring Fence – which identifies a core area within Science Vale where new homes would be provided to achieve sustainable development in accordance with the Spatial Strategy. The Vale of White Horse was also split into three sub-areas.

3.6 Figure 4.1 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 explains how these elements making up the Vale of White Horse spatial strategy would support growth:

» The strategy will support the delivery of sustainable growth through three key strands:

Focusing sustainable growth within the Science Vale area, by	Reinforcing the service centre roles of the main settlements across the district, by:	Promoting thriving villages and rural communities whilst safeguarding the countryside and village character, by:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promoting Science Vale as a world-class location for science and technology-based enterprise and innovation, especially the Enterprise Zone sites at Milton Park and Harwell Campus</li> <li>• allocating appropriate land for strategic housing growth to help improve the self-containment of the area. New homes will be delivered at five key locations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Grove</li> <li>– Harwell and Milton Parishes, east of the A34</li> <li>– Harwell Campus</li> <li>– Milton Parish, west of the A34</li> <li>– Wantage</li> </ul> </li> <li>• supporting the redevelopment of surplus land at Didcot A Power Station</li> <li>• delivering a comprehensive package of strategic and local infrastructure and services alongside the housing and employment growth, and</li> <li>• working jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council to drive forward the delivery of high quality development across Science Vale including the provision of enabling infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concentrating larger shopping, tourism and community facilities at Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage to improve their vitality and ensuring they are widely accessible</li> <li>• focusing housing growth at the Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger Villages</li> <li>• allocating strategic housing growth at Abingdon-on-Thames and Faringdon, in addition to the growth within the Science Vale area, to strengthen their service centre roles, and</li> <li>• allocating land for strategic employment growth at Faringdon and Grove to complement the Science Vale sites and to provide jobs close to where people live.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allocating strategic housing growth at our Larger Villages of Harwell, Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor, Radley, Shrivenham, Stanford-in-the-Vale and Sutton Courtenay to help maintain their vibrant communities</li> <li>• identifying appropriate housing requirements for the rural areas to inform neighbourhood plans or the Local Plan 2031 Part 2</li> <li>• focusing development within the rural areas to the Larger Villages, thus helping to maintain their vitality and the sustainability of local services, and</li> <li>• supporting appropriate development in the Smaller Villages to help meet the local needs of rural communities.</li> </ul>

3.7 South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are working together to create a new Joint Local Plan, and this provides a new wider geography for the spatial strategy. The districts are very similar in many ways, both are predominantly rural with National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and Green Belt, with main towns and market towns and many villages of varying sizes, as well as the strategically important Science Vale area straddling the boundary of both districts.

3.8 There are some similar aims between the existing separate spatial strategies of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, with both looking to:

- focus growth and infrastructure within Science Vale and the employment sites at Culham Campus, Harwell Campus and Milton Park
- focus growth at the garden communities at Didcot, Berinsfield and Dalton Barracks
- deliver the allocation of large sites some with long lead in times, which will deliver to the end of the plan period (and in some cases, beyond)
- use a settlement hierarchy to support the delivery of the strategy. This reinforced the role that settlements have for communities, through the services and facilities they provide
- facilitate and encourage the role of neighbourhood plans (with only South Oxfordshire making targets for each settlement)
- address the existing unmet housing need of Oxford City, set out in its Oxford Local Plan 2036, that it could not meet within its own area.

3.9 Science Vale and the businesses and enterprises within it make a major contribution to both the Oxfordshire and UK economy. In line with our Joint Local Plan’s vision, it’s crucial that we support the existing sites within Science

Vale and any planned development and delivery of infrastructure within the area to realise the area's potential for economic-led redevelopment at key sites.

- 3.10 Continuing to support the delivery of the garden communities at Didcot, Berinsfield and Dalton Barracks is also important so that these communities continue to focus on achieving their own aims and ambitions. There is significant infrastructure, housing, jobs, facilities, cultural, and green infrastructure enhancements still to come for these areas. Lots of investment has been secured for these communities, and we recognise that some carefully weighed but difficult decisions had to be made about the growth of these communities in the last local plans. It is therefore necessary to make sure these commitments deliver as it was intended, and the garden communities should remain a focus of the preferred strategy.
- 3.11 Many of the housing and employment sites supported by the current plans are either delivering or making strong progress with planning applications. To remove sites which are still deliverable and in conformity with our emerging strategy from the local plan would cause confusion and delay. Replacing these sites with alternative housing sites (if required) would not result in quicker housing delivery, as these alternative sites would be further behind in addressing land ownership constraints, scoping infrastructure requirements, and progressing planning applications. This is best for long-term infrastructure planning and confidence.
- 3.12 A settlement hierarchy is an important tool linked with a spatial strategy. It helps understand which settlements have access to the best range of facilities and might be the most sustainable for locating new development. We currently have successful settlement hierarchies embedded within our adopted local plans, albeit with slightly different names for settlements of different tiers. More information on the settlement hierarchy in the Joint Local Plan can be found in the Settlement Hierarchy Topic Paper.
- 3.13 For new employment, we think promoting the renewal and development of existing employment sites, along with supporting brownfield sites within the built-up areas of Tier 1 to 4 settlements, is a better option than finding new employment sites or dispersing development more widely. This is because these higher tier settlements are where jobs are concentrated and where public transport is more readily available, so these existing locations and larger settlements represent a much more sustainable approach, and can continue to provide valuable job opportunities.

## **Housing and Employment Need context**

- 3.14 The quantum of evidenced need for housing and employment provides important context when shaping the spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan.

- 3.15 The Councils have produced Topic Papers on Housing Requirement and Employment Needs. We have evidenced how the government's standard method for determining housing need, plus the previously agreed unmet need (which helps meet the obligations of the previous Oxfordshire Growth Deal) form the basis for each Council's housing need. Our emerging housing requirement is lower than it was for each district in our adopted plans. Within a single coherent spatial strategy for our similar districts (see paragraph 3.9), we are maintaining separate housing figures for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse when planning for that lower housing number. There is no need for one district to accommodate housing for the other, and we will monitor delivery by district.
- 3.16 The adopted plans for South Oxfordshire is under five years old, and the Vale LPP1 and Vale LPP2 have been reviewed under Regulation 10 before they became five years old. As relatively young local plans, many of the allocated sites within those plans will deliver well past the end of the existing local plan periods, and are still available to be delivered. As there is no need to undertake a wide search for new sites for the Joint Local Plan, this means that there is no justification to explore adding new elements to the spatial strategy. The previous strategies that govern the distribution of growth that is still to be delivered are extremely important contexts when aligning to a single strategy for the Joint Local Plan.
- 3.17 Similarly, with no new employment sites needed to address our employment needs, there is no justification for exploring new locations for jobs and employment in the districts. This is the case even though the Joint Local Plan identifies enough space to meet the maximum quantum of demand for employment uses shown in the employment evidence base. While the previous plans could only plan for the parts of Didcot and Science Vale that fall within each district, we now can in the joint strategy express a strongly aligned promotion of employment within Science Vale.
- 3.18 The previous Vale local plans identified strategy sub-areas within the Vale of White Horse. There is now no justification for continuing this, for the following reasons. Firstly, there is a need to continue to focus on planned growth at Science Vale in line with national policy and local economic strategies that support the area. Also, we have chosen to create specific Town based policies in the Joint Local Plan which means that there is less need for sub-areas. Also, the adopted Vale Local Plan Part 2 commitments for meeting Oxford's unmet needs are adopted and are delivering, meaning the purpose for that sub-area designation has now fallen away.

## Duty to Cooperate

- 3.19 Our preferred option (Option A) reflects the Duty to Cooperate by continuing with sufficient sites committed to address the agreed unmet housing needs of Oxford City. Combined, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse previously committed to securing 7,150 homes for Oxford's unmet need.
- 3.20 South and Vale intend to continue to commit to the sites/amount of supply for meeting this agreed unmet need in our emerging Joint Local Plan, and the spatial strategy reflects this by directly referencing it.

## Green Belt

- 3.21 There is sufficient land within the districts to provide for the Councils' identified housing needs and the agreed unmet need, therefore there is no justification for the release of new areas of Green Belt for development, although new planned parkland at Dalton Barracks will be within the Green Belt.
- 3.22 Given that there is no justification for Green Belt to be considered within a development strategy for the Joint Local Plan, the preferred option is justified in stating that national Green Belt policy will apply on all areas to be protected for Green Belt purposes.

## Other Plans and Strategies

### [Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#)

- 3.23 Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan vision document (LTCP Part 1) was adopted in July 2022 and outlines a long-term vision for transport and travel across Oxfordshire to 2050. The vision seeks to deliver an inclusive and safe net-zero transport system that will tackle inequality and improve health and wellbeing. Vision Zero is one of the LTCP's policies which seeks to get to zero road fatalities or life-changing injuries on Oxfordshire's transport system. The LTCP also seeks to achieve improvements to air quality and to reduce the need to travel and reduce private car use. The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan Part 2 (LTCP Part 2) will action a range of the policies that are set out in the vision i.e. undertake the work required to achieve policies set out in LTCP Part 1.
- 3.24 Both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse councils have declared climate emergencies and made commitments to progress towards becoming carbon neutral districts by 2030 and 2045 respectively. Both councils have

committed to support active and sustainable travel infrastructure initiatives to address the emergency.

3.25 This new transport planning approach, which is designed to reduce private car travel and thus address transport-related emissions, has been taken into account when drawing up a combined spatial strategy for South and Vale.

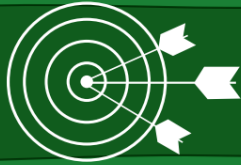
## **Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

3.26 The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision<sup>1</sup> to 2050 is a long-term vision for long-term sustainable development, prepared by all the councils in Oxfordshire working together through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. We can help deliver the vision alongside our own, by ensuring that we reflect it within the spatial strategy of the local plan. The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision is reproduced overleaf.

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<sup>1</sup> [futureoxfordshirepartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Strategic-Vision\\_V0.7.pdf](https://futureoxfordshirepartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Strategic-Vision_V0.7.pdf) May, 2021





**Our aim is to utilise the unique opportunities and assets in Oxfordshire to realise sustainable growth, and shape healthy, resilient communities in which it is possible for all residents to thrive and which can be an exemplar for the rest of the UK and other locations internationally.**

**If we are successful, by 2050 Oxfordshire will:**



be a globally competitive economy which is sustainable, diverse and inclusive, generating high-quality, productive and knowledge-based employment for our communities. It will utilise the county's strengths and resources, including its world-class universities and world-leading research, innovation and technology assets. There will be improved educational attainment and a skills system aligned to the needs of business and communities, helping to provide the conditions in which all Oxfordshire's people can benefit and thrive.



have transformed movement and connectivity within the County and beyond. There will be greater digital connectivity and physical mobility in and between places in ways that enhance environmental, social and economic wellbeing, with an emphasis on sustainable travel, including walking and cycling.



be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than that in which we found it. The natural environment will be more biodiverse, support social, economic and ecological resilience and have the capacity to adapt to change.



have flourishing, diverse and vibrant communities rooted in pride with our local, national and international connections and a strong sense of civic identity. Individuals and families will support each other in partnership with sustainable public services, a thriving voluntary and community sector and be connected to dynamic and socially responsible businesses.



have a healthier and happier population with better physical and mental health. Young people will feel confident, positive and excited about their future and people will spend more of their later life active, in good health and with care available in their communities to meet their changing needs.



have energy efficient, well-designed homes, sufficient in numbers, location, type, size, tenure and affordability to meet the needs of our growing economy, young people, residents and future generations.



enjoy a built and historic environment which is rich and diverse, comprising high-quality places where people want to live, work, visit and invest. Our rich and distinctive internationally recognised heritage assets, visitor economy and vibrant cultural offer will have been further enhanced and there will be improved access to them.



be a more equal place, supported by inclusive growth that gives everyone a fair chance in life to prosper. Deprivation and disadvantage will have been tackled wherever it manifests itself in our urban and rural areas, and discrimination will have been removed.



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.

## Corporate Plans

3.27 We have considered the context set by the Councils' corporate plans when developing the spatial strategy. The following aspects of the preferred spatial strategy align with those plans:

- It is adapted to ensure we prioritise brownfield choices and direct brownfield growth to our most sustainable locations in the settlement hierarchy. This brownfield emphasis helps to reduce the need to travel and help people shift towards more sustainable travel patterns.
- A positive consequence of not needing to find further sites to allocate for housing or employment is that there will be lower environmental impact from development.
- The preferred strategy promotes development patterns that reduce our impact on climate change.
- Support for the community to engage with Neighbourhood Development Plan production.

Here are links to the [South](#) Corporate Plan and [Vale](#) Corporate Plan at the time of the Regulation 18 preparation and Regulation 19 publication.

## Sustainability Appraisal

3.28 Our Sustainability Appraisal (SA) that accompanies the Preferred Options Joint Local Plan assessed four reasonable alternative options for the spatial strategy that could be applied in South and Vale.

3.29 The SA journey began with the preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal Screening and Scoping Report which was consulted upon alongside the JLP Issues consultation in spring 2022. This report outlined the intended scope and level of detail to be included within the Sustainability Appraisal and included a plan, programme and strategy review, an evidence base for the assessment, key issues and environmental challenges to address, and a preliminary Sustainability Appraisal Framework of appraisal objectives against which the Joint Local Plan could be assessed. The consultation responses informed a final SA Screening Report, including the production of a finalised SA Framework used to assess the JLP.

3.30 Following the scoping stage, the SA consultants (Urban Edge Environmental Consulting) assessed strategic alternatives for spatial strategies, which set out where new development would be promoted and where it would be limited to meet the objectives of the Plan. The four options considered and assessed included:

- Option A (preferred): Guiding new development to Science Vale, to Garden Communities and to locations in the highest tiers of the

settlement hierarchy, as well as maximising opportunities for renewal and regeneration on brownfield land;

- Option B: Greenfield expansion at Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements;
- Option C: Co-location of housing and employment, including development on greenfield sites; and
- Option D: More dispersed pattern of development including at smaller villages (Tier 4) within the Settlement Hierarchy.

Further detail regarding the preferred option – Option A, and the three alternatives (Options B, C and D) is provided at pages 24-29 of this topic paper, and sets out what the four options entail in full.

3.31 In addition to considering different spatial distributions of new housing within the Districts, four alternative levels of housing requirement presented in the Preferred Options Plan were also assessed. The four options considered and assessed included:

- Option A (preferred): Guiding new development to Science Vale, to Garden Communities and to locations in the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy, as well as maximising opportunities for renewal and regeneration on brownfield land;
- Option B: Greenfield expansion at Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements;
- Option C: Co-location of housing and employment, including development on greenfield sites; and
- Option D: More dispersed pattern of development including at smaller villages (Tier 4) within the Settlement Hierarchy.

All four spatial strategy options were assessed against eleven sustainability objectives.

3.32 Whilst the detailed outcome of how these options performed in the SA can be seen within the SA assessments<sup>2</sup>, we can summarise the outcome. Option B and Option D would have significantly poorer predicted sustainability effects than either the preferred Option A and Option C, with only one SA objective (SA Objective 9) showing a predicted overall positive effect for either of these options. This is a very clear justification for ruling out Options B and D from being preferred options.

3.33 The Sustainability Appraisal outcome after testing the Preferred Option A and Option C was similar, but a more marked positive impact would be predicted from Option A for objectives 2, 3, 8 & 9, demonstrating the strongest positive effects are predicted with respect to accessibility, natural resources and housing. This is likely to be because Option A includes more wide-ranging aims than Option C. This was an important reason for choosing Option A as our preferred option .

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<sup>2</sup> Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment for the South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan Sustainability Report for the Pre-Submission Local Plan (September 2024) Chapter 5: Assessment of reasonable alternatives. pages 25-40 & Appendix F .

## Summary of Previous Consultation Stages

3.34 We did not present our proposed spatial strategy at the Joint Local Plan Issues stage in May 2022, because at this time this work was being undertaken through the Oxfordshire Plan.

3.35 However, the feedback to three questions asked at the Issues consultation stage gives some relevant insights into some preferences that people who responded to our consultation expressed about things that relate to the spatial strategy.

### **Question 1. What three things do you value most about where you live?**

Key themes emerged from the responses to this question, for example, countryside, wildlife, nature and open spaces, transport and access including good transport links, and references to local communities and a sense of community. Multiple responses mentioned that they value the proximity to Oxford, and ease of access to Oxford and other cities and towns from where respondents' lived. Access to facilities and services was also raised multiple times, with mention of convenient access to medical centres, hospitals, shops, schools, open green spaces, pubs, restaurants and sports facilities. The need for these services to be accessible and have the capacity to serve existing and new residents was highlighted. Respondents also mentioned their sense of community, quality of life, their neighbours and having a caring community. Responses referred to 'village life' and village communities where there is friendship and someone to help if needed. There was some support for development at public transport nodes. Development in the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy to support and access facilities and services was valued.

The preferred strategy has responded positively to this feedback with:

- Promotion of new brownfield development, especially at the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy
- The continuation of existing allocated sites to meet Oxford's unmet need

**Question 3. Overall, do you agree that these are the main issues that the Joint Local Plan should consider? If there are any other issues the Local Plan should consider, please let us know in this box**

Reflecting on the feedback received about the other issues that the Joint Local Plan should consider, the most common category of response was around a lack of adequate infrastructure and services. This feedback points to the need to avoid dispersed growth and ensure that facilities and services in key locations need to be maintained and supported.

The preferred strategy has responded positively to this feedback with:

- Promotion of new brownfield development at the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy;
- Continued allocation of sites where planned infrastructure is established, wherever these sites remain viable and deliverable

**Question 17. If you have any other thoughts on how we could use the Joint Local Plan to tackle housing inequality and affordability, please write them here.**

A number of comments were received about where development should be focused and what should influence the emerging spatial strategy. Comments were also received in support of a brownfield-first approach and exploring opportunities to re-develop under-utilised areas within existing settlements. Several responses championed the role of neighbourhood planning in helping to meet the districts', and their own, local housing need.

This indicated a preference for higher-order settlements to be the main locations for growth, where services and access to them is best. Density increases were supported and this could support increased delivery of housing at existing allocations, and a preference to make the best use of existing sites. Support for brownfield reference comes across in response to this question. Continued support locally for neighbourhood planning should be factored into a positive strategy for their continued use.

3.36 During the Preferred Options consultation we received significant support for the preferred Option (Option A), with respondents feeding back that they thought that it protected the Green Belt and countryside including National Landscapes, that is supported development in Science Vale, that they thought it achieved the co-location of jobs and homes, and many liked the prioritisation of brownfield land for development.

3.37 The most voiced concern raised about Option A is the implication that those places lower in the settlement hierarchy won't have much brownfield land availability, and they won't see new developments to sustain those settlements. The councils' position is that the strategy enables further development to be

guided by neighbourhood plans, which is reasonable to expect will happen in South and Vale with the historic take up of Neighbourhood Planning and the positive outcomes that it has had for our local communities.

## **Section 4: Policy options**

- 4.1 As context to this section, the preferred spatial strategy that was presented in the Joint Local Plan Preferred Option was Option A. An accompanying draft policy which expresses that option was presented alongside the preferred option description, and each options description is explained below.

## Option A – Preferred

*We have prepared icons to visually represent this spatial option, taken from the JLP in a nutshell:*



We want to guide new development to Science Vale, to our Garden Communities and to locations in the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy (Tiers 1, 2 and 3) as set out in Policy SP1. In smaller settlements in Tier 4, some more specific brownfield development is also appropriate within the built-up area. This helps to reduce the need to travel and help people shift towards more sustainable travel patterns.

We also want to take opportunities for renewal and regeneration, by supporting the redevelopment of well-located brownfield land, and we will introduce some new site allocations to help support this aim, as well as supporting brownfield developments that come forward as windfalls where it helps to achieve our other aim to reduce the need to travel. We will also support the delivery of our viable and developable existing allocations, which align with our new spatial strategy. Site allocations have been reviewed to see how they perform against the new spatial strategy.

We want to support the preparation of new neighbourhood plans that will reinforce this spatial strategy, but also encourage ambitious projects if parish or town councils want to deliver more.

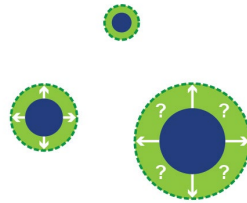
Our spatial strategy should protect Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt. We have started a review to look for the potential to enhance and even possibly extend the Oxford Green Belt in our Districts.

A Key Diagram sets out our preferred spatial strategy in simple map form.

- 4.2 There were also three alternatives (Options B-D) presented in the Preferred Options JLP which were developed as distinct and realistic reasonable alternatives, considering the background context and evidence that is summarised within Section 3 of this topic paper. The alternatives were:

## Option B – Alternative - Greenfield expansion at Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements

*We have prepared icons to visually represent this spatial option, taken from the JLP in a nutshell:*



Greenfield expansion at Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements.

This option would permit some suitable greenfield sites adjacent to Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements which would give more housing supply and choice at our most sustainable settlements.

This option would significantly over-supply the amount of housing beyond what is needed to meet local needs. This option is unlikely to help achieve the aims for carbon neutrality, reducing the need to travel or maximising brownfield redevelopment opportunities. It may add traffic on the roads and create pressure on community infrastructure, the delivery of which in some cases still needs to catch up from the last round of allocations. It may also slow down or undermine the delivery of housing and other development principles at our three Garden Communities.



### **Option C – Alternative - Co-location of housing and employment, including development on greenfield sites**

*We have prepared icons to visually represent this spatial option, taken from the JLP in a nutshell:*



Co-location of housing and employment, including development on greenfield sites.

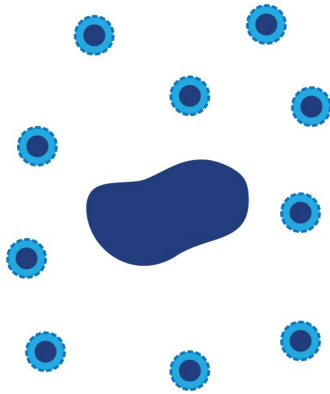
This could be achieved by the Joint Local Plan setting development targets at settlements where co-location of housing and employment already exists (Tier 1 settlements), or it could be achieved by making new allocations at strategically important employment locations. This option would be a choice to allocate more development than we need to deliver. As such it may add pressure on community facilities and transport networks.

This alternative is very likely to support new sustainable transport networks and connections because of our focus for development within Tier 1 settlements.

The current spatial strategies for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse (and partly Option A) overlaps with this alternative, because some of the existing allocated sites fall within the Science Vale area where it could support co-location of housing and employment within that cluster of sites and Tier 1 settlements.

**Option D – Alternative - More dispersed pattern of development including at smaller villages (Tier 4) within the Settlement Hierarchy**

*We have prepared icons to visually represent this spatial option, taken from the JLP in a nutshell:*



More dispersed pattern of development including at smaller villages (Tier 4) within the settlement hierarchy.

This would involve setting development targets for parishes or settlements in the districts. This would reflect the approach in the current spatial strategy of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan to support more development at smaller settlements (the equivalent of Tier 4) as well as at Tiers 1, 2 and 3. This approach could support smaller villages and maintaining their vitality and it encourages a high level of participation in neighbourhood plan making.

We do not prefer this option because it is likely to lead to more homes being dispersed to places where there are fewer jobs, services and facilities, and is less likely to support a shift to more sustainable modes of transport including active travel like walking and cycling. Our housing numbers don't require us to make this ask again of neighbourhood plans.

### **Option A – Preferred**

We want to guide new development to Science Vale, to our Garden Communities and to locations in the highest tiers of the settlement hierarchy (Tiers 1, 2 and 3) as set out in Policy SP1. In smaller settlements in Tier 4, some more specific brownfield development is also appropriate within the built-up area. This helps to reduce the need to travel and help people shift towards more sustainable travel patterns.

We also want to take opportunities for renewal and regeneration, by supporting the redevelopment of well-located brownfield land, and we will introduce some new site allocations to help support this aim, as well as supporting brownfield developments that come forward as windfalls where it helps to achieve our other aim to reduce the need to travel. We will also support the delivery of our viable and developable existing allocations, which align with our new spatial strategy. Site allocations have been reviewed to see how they perform against the new spatial strategy.

We want to support the preparation of new neighbourhood plans that will reinforce this spatial strategy, but also encourage ambitious projects if parish or town councils want to deliver more.

Our spatial strategy should protect Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt. We have started a review to look for the potential to enhance and even possibly extend the Oxford Green Belt in our Districts.

A Key Diagram sets out our preferred spatial strategy in simple map form.

### **Option B – Alternative**

Greenfield expansion at Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements.

This option would permit some suitable greenfield sites adjacent to Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements which would give more housing supply and choice at our most sustainable settlements.

This option would significantly over-supply the amount of housing beyond what is needed to meet local needs. This option is unlikely to help achieve the aims for carbon neutrality, reducing the need to travel or maximising brownfield redevelopment opportunities. It may add traffic on the roads and create pressure on community infrastructure, the delivery of which in some cases still needs to catch up from the last round of allocations. It may also slow down or undermine the delivery of housing and other development principles at our three Garden Communities.

### **Option C – Alternative**

Co-location of housing and employment, including development on greenfield sites.

This could be achieved by the Joint Local Plan setting development targets at settlements where co-location of housing and employment already exists (Tier 1 settlements), or it could be achieved by making new allocations at strategically important employment locations. This option would be a choice to allocate more development than we need to deliver. As such it may add pressure on community facilities and transport networks.

This alternative is very likely to support new sustainable transport networks and connections because of our focus for development within Tier 1 settlements.

The current spatial strategies for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse (and partly Option A) overlaps with this alternative, because some of the existing allocated sites fall within the Science Vale area where it could support co-location of housing and employment within that cluster of sites and Tier 1 settlements.

### **Option D – Alternative**

More dispersed pattern of development including at smaller villages (Tier 4) within the settlement hierarchy.

This would involve setting development targets for parishes or settlements in the districts. This would reflect the approach in the current spatial strategy of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan to support more development at smaller settlements (the equivalent of Tier 4) as well as at Tiers 1, 2 and 3. This approach could support smaller villages and maintaining their vitality and it encourages a high level of participation in neighbourhood plan making.

We do not prefer this option because it is likely to lead to more homes being dispersed to places where there are fewer jobs, services and facilities, and is less likely to support a shift to more sustainable modes of transport including active travel like walking and cycling. Our housing numbers don't require us to make this ask again of neighbourhood plans.

- 4.3 By focusing development in the highest tiers of the hierarchy, Option A is the best option to support the vitality of our most sustainable communities by promoting growth where there are jobs, services and well-connected facilities. This is what the NPPF guides local plans to achieve and what the Oxfordshire LTCP would support. This also reflects the guidance in the NPPF at paragraph 74, where it asks plans to consider opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, and we have planned infrastructure schemes to deliver long-term growth around Didcot in the pipeline. Option B would achieve this to some extent, but not to the same extent as Option A because greenfield sites typically come forward around the edges of

settlements where access to services and facilities is not as easy. Option C may risk there being too much focus on housing delivery where business parks exist, but these could be locations where not many other facilities and services that large numbers of people need are close-by. Option D is more dispersed and doesn't therefore focus on the most sustainable communities.

- 4.4 Science Vale growth also remains a key part of our preferred strategy. This is in line with the NPPF at paragraph 74, which asks plans to meet needs so that the area's economic potential is considered.
- 4.5 Option A has a focus on re-using brownfield land, which is guided by paragraph 123 of the NPPF, and we prefer this as opposed to growing settlements outwards onto greenfield sites as Option B proposes. To do this, Option A uses the settlement hierarchy to support brownfield sites at higher tiers in the settlement hierarchy (Tiers 1, 2 and 3) plus some more specific brownfield development within Tier 4 settlements. Development elsewhere in the countryside is restricted. This strategy protects the remaining Green Belt and recognises the importance of the National Landscapes. Option B will obviously not promote brownfield land development, and it risks impact on Green Belt and National Landscapes, which are sometimes abutting some main settlements in South and Vale, which is where greenfield expansion opportunities tend to have come forward. Option C also risks not focussing on brownfield opportunities. Option D risks impact on Green Belt and National Landscapes where a number of settlements in South and Vale are located.
- 4.6 Our emerging strategy covers the period from 2021 to 2041. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF says that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet the development needs of their area. Our needs for homes and jobs are set out in Policy HOU1 and Policy JT1 of the Joint Local Plan. The Plan has consistently expressed the same approach from Regulation 18 stages to Regulation 19, that it would by stating that it will be seeking to:
- meet housing need as determined by the standard method;
  - meet Oxford's agreed unmet housing need;
  - meet employment needs evidenced by the Employment Land Needs Assessment.

The new spatial strategy in Policy SP1 has reflected this approach taken to needs by the JLP. Any local planning authority could explore any number of alternative approaches such as critiquing the standard method, making a case for not meeting the previously agreed amounts of unmet housing need, or making other cases to change approach to meeting needs for housing or employment. The key consideration is whether the alternatives to test are reasonable, taking into account the need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances in doing so. The SA tested various alternatives to the housing requirement including maintaining existing levels of housing need, using only the Standard Method without Oxford unmet need, and undertaking an

alternative Housing Need Assessment. However, the JLP has not proposed to justify such alternatives. In those circumstances, whilst various theoretical spatial strategy alternatives could have been explored, some are not reasonable in the context of the JLP.

- 4.7 We have already identified a supply of housing land to meet the housing numbers required over the plan period thanks to the supply of sites in the last local plans, some of which are large strategic sites and new garden communities, which will keep delivering well after the end of the last plan period. Given the context of the NPPF guiding us to meet the development needs of the area, and having sufficient sites including a supply buffer, this means that the scope for considering a wide range of options for the strategy was limited. The new spatial strategy reflects the availability of existing allocations which have not yet been completed, but where good progress has been made toward securing planning permission. Those allocations have been reviewed as part of this JLP process, and throughout that time careful consideration has been given as to whether the strategy remained appropriate (and the sites that accord with the new spatial strategy), and it is the Councils view that it does in the context of the supply of land remaining available. It would be unreasonable for us to select a preferred approach for the spatial strategy, which would mean significant amounts of new developments beyond meeting development needs.
- 4.8 Option A focuses on making sure that the very difficult decisions to allocate large sites for development in our last local plans are seen through to completion where they remain viable and developable. Under Option A, our new spatial strategy focuses on the delivery of those existing allocations, and the plan will review what would be needed to ensure we support their integration into a sustainable transport network, alongside how to achieve better self-containment. Each site is different, but broadly they are well located close to Tier 1, 2 or 3 settlements, with established opportunities to support good quality connectivity, or offer a chance for brownfield redevelopment near to a higher tier settlement in the settlement hierarchy. Some of the sites have opportunities for links to Oxford or other towns or larger villages or they are near key routes. On a strategic level, delivery of these large sites remains as part of the strategy for development and this is consistent with the objectives of the Joint Local Plan, although individual allocations (separate policies in the Local Plan), needed review to assess each site on its merits.
- 4.9 For sites delivering for Oxford unmet need, those sites previously allocated or indicated to help to meet the needs of Oxford will continue to remain allocated to meet the level of need that South and Vale agreed to deliver. This remains relevant to this plan; providing alternative sites is not needed because the sites that would contribute remain deliverable in this plan period and there are more than enough sites close to Oxford, including on previously allocated or indicated sites that would continue to meet those needs. Removing the

allocations and renegeing on the previous agreement to provide for unmet needs would not reflect our obligations to address Oxford's unmet need from their existing Local Plan 2036. Similarly, there are no resolutions about any potential future Oxford unmet need arising from plans beyond the Oxford Local Plan 2036, and there is also no apportionment in place should there be future need. In these circumstances we have concluded that there are no reasonable alternatives to the position presented in SP1, to continue the current approach to meet evidenced unmet need.

- 4.10 Since neighbourhood planning was introduced in 2011, our districts have been part of many years of successful local decision making through neighbourhood plans. In the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan, some towns and villages were given development targets for neighbourhood plans to achieve so that communities could make their own decisions about which sites should be developed.
- 4.11 The last round of neighbourhood plans addressing the targets have mostly been completed, with just Thame to complete its neighbourhood plan review, which is well underway. There is therefore no rationale to set further targets, but we want to support neighbourhood plans to bring forward any outstanding planned development.
- 4.12 Our preferred strategy encourages new neighbourhood plan production and gives communities flexibility to justify going further than the spatial strategy to support ambitious ideas to deliver something specific in their local communities where they want to. For example, Long Wittenham Neighbourhood Plan in 2022 allocated housing where none was required in order to deliver a much-wanted community hub.
- 4.13 Given that we have very active participation in neighbourhood planning in our districts, it is unreasonable to expect that the strategy could do anything other than support continued preparation of these plans, and our Councils' encouragement and support for innovation and ambition in neighbourhood plan making will continue.

## Section 5: Conclusion

- 5.1 In this Topic Paper, the section 2 Policy Review provides a review of the relevant context of national policy that we need to take into account when developing a spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan.
- 5.2 Section 3 on Evidence explains how our currently separate adopted spatial strategies in the South and Vale adopted Local Plans play an important role when considering what needs to be carried forward within the now joined spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan.
- 5.3 This section also provides some context about our housing and employment needs and how much supply we have to meet those needs. This helped us to refine the options that we have available for developing a spatial strategy, and it helps to demonstrate why the preferred option has been formed to focus on delivering against those needs.
- 5.4 We have also set out in this section how our legal obligations under the duty to cooperate have been discharged when deciding how the agreed committed growth for Oxford's unmet need has to be considered with our spatial strategy.
- 5.5 The influence of other plans and strategies on our spatial strategy is also summarised in section 3.
- 5.6 We also explain in section 3 how the relevant feedback from the issues consultation stage has helped inform our preferred strategy.
- 5.7 We have summarised the outcomes of the sustainability appraisal and explained that this process has been key to ensuring that the strategy chosen is the most sustainable when considered against the reasonable alternatives.
- 5.8 Section 4 on Policy Options sets out the distinct reasonable alternatives for the spatial strategy for South and Vale, and the reasons why the preferred option (Option A) was the best option for the Joint Local Plan's spatial strategy. Some key reasons for this being the preferred option are that it:
- supports the vitality of our most sustainable communities
  - considers opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure
  - supports the area's economic potential
  - promoted re-using brownfield land in line with the NPPF
  - protects the remaining Green Belt and recognises the importance of the National Landscapes
  - promotes a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet the development needs of their area
  - reflects local circumstances by enabling neighbourhood plans.



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