

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan EIP

Matter 2 – Maintaining Effective Co-operation

Issue – Whether effective cooperation has been maintained with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework?

Q2.1 Does the additional information provided in the 'Note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation' [LPA42] (together with the previously submitted information) demonstrate that the Councils have maintained effective cooperation in a way that seeks to ensure the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy?

Q2.2 The 'Note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation' (Feb 2026) [LPA42] sets out the engagement that has taken place between the Councils, Oxford City Council and other Oxfordshire Councils in relation to housing needs and the housing requirement. This includes an Interim SoCG for the Oxford Local Plan (OLP) (Appendix 2 of LPA42).

- a. What progress has been made since the publication of the Interim SoCG in terms of potential unmet housing need in the emerging OLP and how this is expected to be apportioned across the respective Districts?*
- b. What is the expected timetable for finalising the SoCG? And could the agreed version of this be added to the examination library in advance of the discussion of this matter at the hearings?*
- c. Does the joint working on the interim SoCG taken together with related activity and engagements help to determine whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area could be met elsewhere?*

In considering whether the engagement has been effective it is necessary to consider the tests of soundness and in particular paragraph 35c which states that in order to be sound plans must be deliverable over the plan period, based on effective joint working on cross boundary matters that have been dealt with and not deferred. One of the key cross boundary issue for the Oxfordshire plan making authorities is the issue of Oxford's unmet housing needs. This has been recognised by the LPAs and agreement has been reached between Oxford City and SODC and VoWH that they will make a contribution towards addressing Oxford's unmet needs.

However, this agreement is based on SODC and VoWH planning on the basis of a minimum housing need of 579 dwellings per annum (dpa) and 633 dpa respectively. However, as we note in our response to question 1.2 for Matter 1 the Councils are required to reach Gateway 1 and the start of formal plan making by the 31st of October on local plans that will as a minimum need to plan for 1,208 dpa in SODC and 970 dpa in VoWH. These are significant increases in the housing numbers and HBF are concerned that the current agreements that have informed the JLP provide insufficient certainty to Oxford City that their needs will be met in full.

While it could be argued that it is for the new plan to address it must be recognised that the Councils are required by statute to begin preparing a new plan before the JLP has been adopted. As such it must form part of the co-operation

related to this plan and how more certainty can be given to Oxford City that their housing needs will be met in full in neighbouring areas. This issue is alluded to in LP42 and the SoCG in Appendix 2 which confirms in paragraph 26 and paragraph 28 that no sites have been ring fenced in relation to Oxford's unmet needs but does refer to sites that will contribute towards those needs.

Part of effective co-operation is ensuring that there are outcomes that address the cross-boundary issues at hand and does not defer these to future reviews of the local plan. In this case the cross-boundary issue is the need to ensure Oxford City's housing needs between 2025 and 2045 are addressed and not compromised by future plans that are being prepared before this plan has been adopted. In HBF's view this requires the Councils to specifically identify in policy, specifically SP1, those sites that will contribute towards Oxford's unmet housing needs. This does not require formal ringfencing leading to separate monitoring of those sites as the contribution towards the unmet needs of Oxford are included within the housing requirements for SODC and VoWH. However, what it will do is provide more certainty that in future plan making these specific sites will be seen as meeting Oxford's unmet needs and that other sites will need to be identified to meet the future needs arising in SODC or VoWH to 2045.

Our only other observation on whether co-operation has been effective is that no further work was undertaken to consider collectively whether housing needs aligned with jobs growth and the expectation that Oxford City and its surrounding area will be a national priority for economic growth as part of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor¹. While it is evident that the link between new homes and economic growth has been discussed it is not clear what the outcomes of these discussion have been. Given that a key criticism of the Inspectors examining the Oxford City Local Plan 2042 was the city council's assessment of the relationship between housing needs and economic growth HBF would have expected this to have been a focus for additional work in order to understand whether what is being proposed in the JLP is sufficient to support the Government's ambitions for the area.

Q2.3 What is the position in terms of Statements of Common Ground (SoCGs), including the one with the Environment Agency? Are there any SoCGs still outstanding?

No comment.

Q2.4 Does the additional information provided in the 'Note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation' [LPA42] (together with the previously submitted information) demonstrate how joint working has helped to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary?

No comment.

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¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reeves-i-am-going-further-and-faster-to-kick-start-the-economy>