

Policy and Programmes

HEAD OF SERVICE: Tim Oruye



South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse
Joint Local Plan 2041

LPA41

Policy Manager

Inspectors Caroline Mulloy & Rachael Bust
The Planning Inspectorate
(sent via email to the Programme Officer)

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3 December 2025

Dear Inspectors Mulloy and Bust,

Examination of the South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041

Thank you for your letter dated 28 November 2025.

In your letter you ask for the Councils' views on the implications of the recent Written Ministerial Statement (27 November 2025) and the Minister's letter to PINS (27 November 2025) for the Joint Local Plan Examination and in particular how the Councils wish to proceed.

We welcome your letter and would like to thank you for moving swiftly to contact us. Our wish, you will not be surprised to hear, is to ask you to resume the hearings and progress the Joint Local Plan through examination and, all being well, to adoption.

Moving to Stage 2 of the Examination would provide an opportunity to explore any remaining Matters, Issues and Questions that you have. We would be delighted to work with Ian Kemp the programme officer to discuss timings and arrangements.

The Minister's statement and letter confirm the Government's intention not to save the Duty to Cooperate (DtC) in the Regulations to be laid "*shortly*" (WMS) and that the DtC "*will cease to apply when the Regulations come into force early next year*" (letter). The DtC will not feature in the new local plan system, instead being replaced by the new tier of plans (Spatial Development Strategies) and an alignment test for local plans. The Minister has confirmed that the change to remove the DtC will also apply to plans under the current local plan system. Based on "*the government's firm intention to abolish the*

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Duty for the current system” he suggests that examining Inspectors may wish to begin any necessary dialogue with Local Planning Authorities in advance of the Regulations coming into effect. Our observation is that the Joint Local Plan is a current system plan at examination, which remains open and ongoing, and as such is a plan that qualifies for these arrangements.

Although the Regulations are not yet in place, the Government’s clear intention to abolish the Duty to Cooperate means this issue does not need to be resolved now. The DtC is expected to be removed by early next year, well before Stage 2 of the Examination could conceivably conclude. We therefore suggest that the DtC issue could sensibly be postponed for the time being, and, to confirm, we do not expect a substantive response to our October letters in the immediate future. We consider this would be a pragmatic way forward that best achieves the Minister’s desire *“to help drive local plans to adoption as quickly as possible”* and to move towards the formal adoption of a plan which contains important policies and allocations to meet housing and employment needs and policies which advance other aspects of the Councils’ strategic objectives.

DtC legal duties aside, we recognise the soundness tests and the need for consistency with policies in the NPPF on maintaining effective cooperation. We are continuing to collaborate across our boundaries, including on unmet development needs, and recently exchanged correspondence with our neighbour Oxford City Council, in the context of their emerging local plan, accepting in principle unmet needs arising from their emerging plan. We remain willing to explore the proposals we made for modifications in our letter of 20 October 2025 if that provides assistance.

If your decision is that the hearings can resume, we have a number of updates to provide you with, and would be happy to receive your steer on how and when you would like these. These include some studies, now completed, which we would like to propose are added to the examination library (e.g. Water Cycle Study, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment), as well as some additional Statements of Common Ground (with some of the site promoters of JLP allocated sites). There is also one item that was left over from the Action Points for the Stage 1 hearings ([ID09](#), item 4) which is some proposed additional Sustainability Appraisal work on carried forward sites not included in current SA, which we are happy to proceed with and is awaiting your consideration (our consultants indicated would take 4-5 weeks to complete, based on their previous availability and which we will re-check).

We would welcome discussion of next steps with you via the Programme Officer and are hopeful of a positive way forward.

Yours sincerely,



Policy Manager

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