



## **Independent Examination of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041**

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Programme Officer – Mr Ian Kemp

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Policy Manager  
Abbey House  
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OXON  
OX14 3JE

Dear [REDACTED],

### **Examination of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041**

1. Thank you for your letter of 3 December 2025 with regards to the recent Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) (27 November 2025) and the Minister's letter to the Planning Inspectorate (27 November 2025).
2. As outlined in our letter dated 28 November 2025, the WMS made by Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning on 27 November 2025 states that the Duty to Cooperate (the Duty) requirement will be removed from plans in the current system.
3. Furthermore, the letter of 27 November 2025 from the Minister to Paul Morrison, the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate states that the Duty will cease to apply when the Regulations come into force early this year, including plans at examination at that point. We note that the Councils wish to resume the hearings and progress the Joint Local Plan through examination.
4. Whilst it is intended that the Duty will cease to apply to existing plans in the current system, the Duty will only be removed upon commencement of the forthcoming Regulations, anticipated early 2026. Furthermore, it must be noted that Inspectors should continue to examine plans in line with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 'maintaining effective cooperation'. We would, therefore, like to

give the Councils advance notice that we would like them to prepare a note in relation to the following:

- i. How the evidence submitted to the Examination in relation to the Duty to Cooperate applies to national policy on 'maintaining effective cooperation'.
  - ii. Any additional evidence setting out how the Councils have collaborated with adjoining authorities and prescribed bodies since the submission of the Joint Local Plan.
  - iii. How they anticipate that any potential inconsistency with national policy on 'maintaining effective cooperation' could be rectified in an examination.
5. Given the complexity of recent developments, we have decided to hold a Procedural Meeting (PM) with the Councils to discuss the best way forward for the examination process. A guidance note will be circulated in advance of the PM. An agenda will also be sent to the Council prior to the meeting which should be published on the website. The PM will be held in public with interested persons able to attend. However, it is anticipated at this stage that only the Inspectors and Councils will participate in discussion at it.
6. **Importantly, there will be no discussion of soundness matters at the PM** which will instead focus on the practical arrangements of resuming the examination in light of the anticipated change to legislative arrangements. At the PM, the Inspectors will explain the particular circumstances that have given rise to the need for the PM and set out proposals for dealing with them, whilst remaining receptive to reasonable alternative suggestions. There will be an opportunity for questions to be put to the Inspectors and for the Inspectors to put questions to the Councils. The Programme Officer (PO) will publish the note of the PM as soon as practicable afterwards.
7. The Councils' note requested in paragraph 4 above is not required in advance of the PM but should be provided in due course to inform the next stage of the Examination. A timetable for receipt of the note may be discussed at the PM if it has not been provided ahead of this. The contents of the note will not be discussed at the PM.
8. The Inspectors will liaise with the Councils via the PO to agree a date and practical arrangements for the PM. We are not inviting comments from anyone else on the contents of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

*Caroline Mulloy and Rachael Bust*

Inspectors