

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

**Statement of Common Ground**

**Between**

**South Oxfordshire District Council,**

**Vale of White Horse District Council and**

**Carter Jonas on behalf of**

**UK Atomic Energy Authority**

**March 2026**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) has been prepared by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils (“the councils”) and Carter Jonas on behalf of UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), hereafter referred to as “the parties”. This SOCG documents those matters agreed with regard to the South and Vale Joint Local Plan 2041 and supporting documents, to assist the Inspectors during the examination of the local plan.
- 1.2. This SOCG particularly relates to the proposed allocation of land at Culham Campus within Policy AS11, for the development of approximately 2.3 hectares of employment land. The agreed matters have been structured to assist the Inspectors through the examination process.
- 1.3. The councils propose the site for allocation for employment land development in the Joint Local Plan having considered reasonable alternatives, including assessing the relevant evidence and following consultation with stakeholders and the public.
- 1.4. A previous SOCG was prepared for this site as part of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 process, which is available to view on the council’s website<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=1670533473&CODE=372B0286AFC64281554EB0EB7C1BB027](https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=1670533473&CODE=372B0286AFC64281554EB0EB7C1BB027)

## **2. Background / Context**

- 2.1. Culham Campus is situated approximately 2.75 miles to the east of Abingdon, 4.5 miles north of Didcot and 5.5 miles south of Oxford.
- 2.2. Culham Campus occupies land formerly used as a naval airfield. In 1959, the UKAEA sought a site for a new laboratory for plasma physics and nuclear fusion research. The Campus, which covers approximately 81 hectares, was conceived, planned and built as a whole. The original complex of buildings extended to approximately 59,000sqm.
- 2.3. Culham Campus is owned and managed by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). The Campus is the leading UK centre for fusion research and technology and is of international importance, hosting the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy and a number of related businesses. Culham Campus forms a key part of Science Vale and is one of the largest employment centres in Oxfordshire, currently supporting over 3000 jobs. The councils and national government recognise the key role of the Campus as an internationally important centre of science and research, and support and encourage its future. Accordingly, the site is proposed for continued allocation in the Joint Local Plan for delivery of employment land.
- 2.4. In January 2025 the UK Government announced that it will deliver the first AI Growth Zone at Culham, subject to the agreement of a public-private partnership that delivers benefits to the local area, the UKAEA's fusion energy mission and the UK's wider national AI infrastructure. The government and UKAEA will seek a private-sector partner who would develop one of the UK's largest AI data centres, beginning with 100MW of capacity and with plans to scale up to 500MW. Further updates regarding the details of the AI Growth Zone at Culham Campus are anticipated in due course.
- 2.5. Culham Campus is bound to the north by woodland and fields with Nuneham House Registered parkland beyond, to the west by Culham 'No.1' employment site and the Didcot to Oxford railway line, to the south by the A415 road, and to the east by agricultural fields, with the village of Clifton Hampden beyond.
- 2.6. There are no statutory landscape or wildlife designations on this site. In terms of historic environment, to the north of the site is the Grade I Registered Park and Garden associated with Nuneham House, and to the west is the Grade II\* Listed Culham Station ticket office and waiting room, as well as the Station Overbridge and Thame Lane Bridge (both Grade II Listed). To the east is the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area, including many listed buildings.

## *Local Plans*

### *South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (adopted 2020)*

- 2.7. South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 allocated the site (and released it from the Green Belt) via Policy STRAT 8 - Culham Science Centre, to deliver, in combination with the adjacent strategic allocation (Policy STRAT9) at least a net increase in employment land of at least 7.3 hectares (with the existing 10 hectares of the No.1 site retained but redistributed across the two strategic allocations). (Culham Science Centre is now known as Culham Campus).

### *South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041 (submitted December 2024)*

- 2.8. Joint Local Plan 2041 allocates the campus to deliver approximately 2.3 hectares of employment land through Policy AS11. The policy confirms the councils' support for proposals for additional employment provision at the Campus that are in accordance with an agreed masterplan for the site.
- 2.9. The development will be comprehensively planned - the policy explains that the site owner should work proactively with the council to develop a masterplan for the site that details the principles and parameters which facilitate any future growth.
- 2.10. There is considerable infrastructure investment planned for the Culham area, as outlined in Policy IN3 – Transport Infrastructure and Safeguarding. For example, on 11 December 2024, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a decision granting planning permission for the Housing Infrastructure Fund (“HIF1”) infrastructure scheme. This is a significant infrastructure project that will unlock planned growth across Science Vale – notably around Culham and Didcot. Some infrastructure improvements related to this scheme will be situated within and alongside this site.
- 2.11. Policy AS2 (Land adjacent to Culham Campus), allocates the delivery of approximately 3,500 new homes, 60 units of housing with care for older people, between 6 and 10 pitches for gypsies and travellers, supporting services and facilities and to optimise the use of existing employment land at the No.1 site.
- 2.12. The allocations at Policy AS11 and AS2 therefore provide an opportunity to deliver housing adjacent to one of the major employers in southern Oxfordshire and enable Culham Campus to realise its full potential as a science campus where publicly funded science research and commercial technology growth can flourish. Development in this location is at the heart of Science Vale and supports the delivery of much needed significant infrastructure.

### **3. Agreed Matters**

- 3.1. The parties agree that the councils are supporting a key objective of the Joint Local Plan in allocating sites that help plan for enough new jobs, a flourishing local economy, and a wide range of jobs, including in the science and innovation sector.
- 3.2. Recognising the pivotal role of the UKAEA and the groundbreaking research conducted at Culham Campus, both parties acknowledge that this work is instrumental in unlocking the potential of Science Vale, which brings substantial benefits to the local, regional and national economies.
- 3.3. The site is sustainable, suitable, available and developable.
- 3.4. The site is not subject to any insurmountable environmental, legal, ownership or technical constraints that would otherwise impede development.
- 3.5. The parties agree that development on this site can be delivered in general accordance with the policies contained in the Joint Local Plan 2041.
- 3.6. The parties agree that the site will deliver a high-quality, sustainable development comprising a net increase in employment land.
- 3.7. The site allocation accords with the Spatial Strategy of the Local Plan as set out in Policy SP1 – Spatial Strategy.
- 3.8. The site will be delivered in accordance with Policy AS11: Culham Campus and the large scale major site requirements as set out in Policy LS1: Proposals for large scale major development.
- 3.9. The parties agree that Policy AS11: Culham Campus identifies an appropriate approach to ensuring development at the campus is delivered comprehensively.
- 3.10. The parties will work collaboratively to explore the potential of a Culham Campus Local Development Order (LDO).
- 3.11. Both parties agree that the site selection process, as set out in the Site Selection Topic Paper, is robust and soundly based and supported by the councils' evidence base, which includes the Employment Land Needs Assessment.
- 3.12. The parties agree that Policy AS11: Culham Campus identifies the key requirements for this site to deliver.
- 3.13. Where any development is proposed within the site allocation on land where there are significant surface water flow paths, the parties agree that detailed modelling would be required at the planning application stage, with a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) provided. The councils' Flood Risk Engineers would also provide further advice. The parties agree with the flood risk requirements set out in Policy CE6 (Flood Risk).

- 3.14. The parties are working positively together to ensure there is adequate planning for infrastructure necessary to support further development at Culham Campus and that appropriate infrastructure will be delivered as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The site will contribute appropriately towards the delivery of necessary transport infrastructure.
- 3.15. In light of the recent designation of the AI Growth Zone at Culham Campus, both parties commit to working collaboratively to maximise the employment opportunities this presents for research organisations and businesses operating on site, and to bring benefits for local communities.
- 3.16. The parties are committed to continued partnership working, including regular meetings, to ensure the optimum outcome for the site that delivers new employment-generating development in a sustainable location.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1. UKAEA support the allocation of land at Culham Campus within Policy AS11, and the parties agree that the site is suitable, available and developable for employment development.
- 4.2. The parties are working jointly to enable delivery of the planned development of employment land within the plan period. The parties will continue to work cooperatively on all matters of mutual interest.

#### **Signatures**

Signed on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council

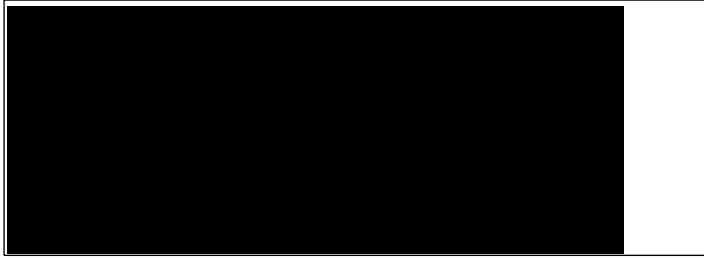


Name: Tim Oruye

Job Title: Head of Policy and Programmes

Date: 26 March 2026

Signed on behalf of UK Atomic Energy Authority



Name: Peter Canavan

Job Title: Partner (Carter Jonas)

Date: 26 March 2026