



Planning Inspectorate

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

Inspectors' Matters, Issues and Questions for Examination

Part 2 [ID19]

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Introduction

The first part of the Independent Examination into the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan took place June 2025. These Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) are for the second part of the Examination. The third part is anticipated to take place Autumn 2026 subject to the outcome of Part 2. The deadlines for the submission of any hearing statements will be phased accordingly.

This document contains the MIQs for the second part of hearings and it is accompanied by a second Inspectors' Guidance Note [ID17].

The following MIQs will help us decide if the Plan is sound and legally compliant and, if not, how it could be modified to ensure that it is.

The hearing programme setting out individual sessions and participants is set out in a separate document [ID18].

Where relevant, we refer to the further work undertaken since the first part of the Examination in the MIQs. This includes a note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation [LPA42], the Habitat Regulations Addendum [LPA43] and the Supplement to the Sustainability Appraisal work (May 2026) [LPA62]. The Councils have also provided their response [LPA63] to the Inspectors' request for information set out in their Examination Process Letter [ID16]. These can be found on the Examination Documents section of the Examination website.

Where we refer to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) it is the December 2023 version. Similarly, any reference to Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), will be to the version relevant to the December 2023 NPPF.

We also draw participants' attention to the [Minister of Housing and Planning's Letter to the Planning Inspectorate of 9 October 2025](#). This sets out his expectations on the 'flexibilities' that Inspectors are expected to apply in examinations relating to the last plans to be brought forward in the legacy system prior to the closing date for submissions in December 2026, such as the one subject to the current examination. According to the October Letter it "is therefore critical that Inspectors approach examinations of current system plans with the appropriate degree of flexibility. The evidencing of expectations to establish whether the legal and soundness tests have been met should be proportionate to the context in which plans in the existing system are being prepared."

MATTER 1 – LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL COMPLIANCE

ISSUE – Whether the Councils have complied with the relevant legal and procedural requirements?

Plan preparation

- Q1.1 Do the Councils intend to update the latest version of the Local Development Scheme (LDS) (August 2024) [OCD01]?
- Q1.2 The Councils are due to start production of a new local plan in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 that came into force in March. What implications might this have for the Plan currently under examination?

Neighbourhood Plans (NP)

- Q1.3 Have any further NPs been made since the Plan's submission?
- Q1.4 Are any modifications to the Plan necessary arising from the contents of any made NPs?

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- Q1.5 What is the outcome of the additional SA/SEA work undertaken in relation to the assessment of carried forward sites as set out in the Supplement to the Sustainability Report (May 2026) [LPA62], and in particular in relation to the assessment of cumulative effect?
- Q1.6 Is any additional work required as a result of the recalculation of local housing need?

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) [CSD04] and Appropriate Assessment [CSD04.1]

- Q1.7 Is the methodology to assess the effects of atmospheric pollution in the Habitats Regulations Assessment Appropriate Assessment Addendum [LPA43] appropriate and robust?
- Q1.8 Are the conclusions of the HRA AA Addendum [LPA43] appropriate and robust? Do Natural England agree with the conclusions of LPA43 in terms of the potential air quality impacts on Cothill Fen, Oxford Meadows and Aston Rowant SACs?
- Q1.9 Overall, does the HRA AA [CSD04 and CSD04.1] with the Addendum [LPA43] comply with the relevant legal requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)?
- Q1.10 Are any modifications to the Plan necessary arising from the HRA AA with the Addendum?
- Q1.11 Are any adjustments needed to the HRA to reflect the recalculation of local housing need?

Strategic policies and the Plan period

Q1.12 LPA25 sets out the Councils' consideration of whether the Plan's policies are strategic or non-strategic in response to Action Point 2. Is the Plan's categorisation of policies as strategic or non-strategic justified and consistent with national policy? Are all policies identified as strategic, genuinely strategic?

Q1.13 Paragraph 22 of the NPPF expects strategic policies to look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from adoption. With this in mind, would main modifications be needed to ensure consistency with national policy, and would any updates to the evidence base be necessary?

Spatial Development Strategy

Q1.14 What is the timetable for the preparation of the Spatial Development Strategy?

MATTER 2 – MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

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

Recent changes brought about by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 have removed the Duty to Cooperate as a legal requirement for plan-making. Nevertheless, the 'Reforming Local Plan-Making' Written Ministerial Statement of 27 November 2025 sets out that Planning Inspectors are expected to continue to examine plans in line with the NPPF on 'maintaining effective cooperation'.

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?
- 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?
- 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?

MATTER 3 – THE HOUSING TARGET/REQUIREMENT

ISSUE – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the overall provision for housing and the housing requirement?

Policy HOU1

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) indicates that the local housing need (LHN) calculations using the standard method may be relied upon for plan making for a period of 2 years from the time that the plan is submitted for examination. Consequently, the Inspectors requested that the LHN be recalculated for the respective Districts.

The Councils have set out the recalculation of the LHN in the 'Response to Inspectors' Request' [LPA63]. Table 1 shows that the recalculated LHN would be 4.7% less than the submission local housing need. Table 2 shows the updated LHN applied to the JLP plan period (2021-2041) and including the previously agreed unmet need from Oxford City Council. This shows that South Oxfordshire's LHN would reduce by 540 dwellings (-3.3%) and Vale of White Horse's LHN would reduce by 600 dwellings (-4.1%) over the plan period.

- Q3.1 With reference to the 'Housing and Economic Needs Assessment' PPG (as updated on 16 December 2020):
- a) Is LPA63's proposal to back-date the recalculated LHN to the start of the Plan period justified?
 - b) Would proceeding on this basis effectively address the implications of any under-supply that may have been factored into the previous LHN calculation (see PPG Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 2a-011-20190220 Revision date: 20 02 2019)?
 - c) Are adjustments needed to the calculation presented in Table 2 of LPA63?
- Q3.2 In light of the above, should the housing requirement set out at Policy HOU1 be amended to reflect the recalculated LHN set out at Tables 1 and 2 of LPA63 in order to achieve a justified Plan?

- Q3.3 Are there any implications of the recalculated LHN for the Joint Housing Needs Assessment [HES15/1]? In particular, are there any implications for the identification of affordable or specialist housing needs in the districts?
- Q3.4 Are there any implications of the recalculated LHN for the evidence base studies supporting the Plan including:
- a) Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) [CSD05.1]/IDP Update (May 2025) [LPA17].
 - b) Viability Report [ITV04].
 - c) Employment Land Needs Assessment 2024 (ELNA) [HES08/HES08.1]
- Q3.5 Are there any implications of the recalculated LHN for meeting future jobs growth taking account of the Councils' Note on the revised housing/employment balance related to the ELNA's hybrid scenario [LPA34]?
- Q3.6 Has there been further discussions/agreements with Oxford City Council in terms of how the JLP seeks to accommodate the previously agreed unmet need for example, the use of a stepped trajectory and not identifying a separate trajectory or specific sites to meet the unmet need for Oxford City Council. If so, are any Main Modifications (MMs) necessary to accommodate any changes arising from the discussions/agreements?

The Submission Joint Local Plan includes an uplift to address unmet housing need from Oxford within the period agreed in the previous Local Plans (South Oxfordshire: 4,950 homes between 2021 and 2035 and Vale of White Horse: 2,200 homes between 2019 and 2031). Suggested principle 7 of the Councils' response (Appendices 3 and 4 of LPA42) to Oxford City Council's formal request to assist with Oxford unmet housing need (Appendix 1 of LPA42) recognises the need to honour these existing commitments.

Part 3 of the Response to Inspectors' Request (LPA63) provides an updated position in terms of newly arising need from Oxford City Council. The emerging OLP 2045 identifies an unmet need total of **12,473** dwellings in the period 2025-2045. Suggested principle number 6 of the Councils' response (Appendices 3 of LPA42) to Oxford City Council's formal request to assist with Oxford unmet housing need (Appendix 1 of LPA42) recognises the need to calculate unmet need for the years that overlap between emerging plan periods.

- Q3.7 Has any further work been undertaken to identify the degree of overlap between the Plan periods for the respective Districts? Has any such work sought to quantify any net additional newly arising unmet need over and above the previously agreed unmet need?
- Q3.8 What proportion of the unmet need identified in the emerging OLP would South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils be expected to accommodate? What implications would this have for the respective housing requirements?
- Q3.9 Are there any suggested MMs arising from the recalculated LHN or the emerging position on newly identified unmet need from the emerging OLP?
- Q3.10 In overall terms, are the respective housing requirements justified?

MATTER 5 – VISION, OBJECTIVES AND SPATIAL STRATEGY

ISSUE - Whether the vision, objectives and spatial strategy are justified, effective, consistent with national policy?

Vision and Objectives

- Q5.1 Are the vision and objectives justified by the evidence and do they reflect the issues and challenges facing the plan area?
- Q5.2 Are the vision and objectives achievable and deliverable in the land use planning system over the plan period?
- Q5.3 Are the timeframes of 2030 and 2045 to achieve net zero carbon districts realistic and justified? And is the extent to which the Plan can influence these factors clearly recognised? Is the Councils' suggested MM01 necessary for soundness?
- Q5.4 Is it clear how the Plan policies will help to deliver the vision and objectives over the plan period?
- Q5.5 Are there any other matters which should be included, clarified, or given greater emphasis within the vision and objectives? If so, what would be the justification?

Spatial Strategy (Policy SP1)

- Q5.6 Does the Plan adequately set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development as required by paragraph 20 of the Framework?
- Q5.7 Is Policy SP1 sufficiently clear to decision-takers, developers and local communities to enable it to be effective?
- Q5.8 Should Policy SP1 set out the quantum/level and distribution of housing and employment requirements?
- Q5.9 Does the spatial strategy place the correct emphasis on Science Vale and the Garden Communities of Didcot, Berinsfield and Dalton Barracks? Is it sufficiently flexible for any change in circumstances over the plan period?
- Q5.10 Is the spatial strategy positively prepared, justified and effective with regard to the cross-boundary issue of the unmet housing needs of Oxford?
- Q5.11 Will the spatial strategy be effective in ensuring that Green Belt boundaries will endure beyond the plan period as per paragraph 145 of the NPPF?

Settlement Hierarchy (Policy SP2)

- Q5.12 What is the role and purpose of the settlement hierarchy?
- Q5.13 Is the settlement hierarchy consistent with the spatial strategy? How are Science Vale and the Garden Communities of Didcot, Berinsfield, and Dalton Barracks reflected in the settlement hierarchy?
- Q5.14 How was the settlement hierarchy established, and how was it determined through the evolution of the Plan? Is the scoring system, including the weighting of scores justified? Is the data robust and up to date?

- Q5.15 Does the settlement hierarchy take into account sufficient and appropriate factors? Is this approach justified and consistent with national policy?
- Q5.16 Have settlements been appropriately allocated in the hierarchy?
- Q5.17 Does Policy SP2 provide an appropriate range of development that will be acceptable which is consistent with the strategic role of the tiers in the settlement hierarchy?
- Q5.18 Has the settlement hierarchy influenced the distribution of site allocations? If so, how? Or if not, why not?
- Q5.19 Is the use of settlement boundaries appropriate, consistently applied across the Plan area and are the defined boundaries justified?

The strategy for Didcot Garden Town (Policy SP3)

- Q5.20 Is the strategy for Didcot Garden Town appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.21 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.22 What status do the Didcot Garden Town Masterplan and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan have?

A strategy for Abingdon-on-Thames (Policy SP4)

- Q5.23 Is the strategy for Abingdon-on-Thames appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.24 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.25 Does Policy SP4 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?
- Q5.26 What status does the Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework have?

A strategy for Faringdon (Policy SP5)

- Q5.27 Is the strategy for Faringdon appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.28 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.29 Does Policy SP5 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?

A strategy for Henley-on-Thames (Policy SP6)

- Q5.30 Is the strategy for Henley-on-Thames appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.31 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.32 Does Policy SP6 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?

A strategy for Thame (Policy SP7)

- Q5.33 Is the strategy for Thame appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.34 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.35 Does Policy SP7 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?

A strategy for Wallingford (Policy SP8)

- Q5.36 Is the strategy for Wallingford appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.37 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.38 Does Policy SP8 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?

A strategy for Wantage (Policy SP9)

- Q5.39 Is the strategy for Wantage appropriate and justified by evidence?
- Q5.40 Is it consistent with the spatial strategy set out in Policy SP1 and the settlement hierarchy in Policy SP2?
- Q5.41 Does Policy SP9 set out an effective framework for all types of development, including housing and employment?

End