

S&V Local Plan Examination - Opening statement, 7 July 2026

Good morning. My name is Tim Oruye, Director of Policy and Programmes at South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. I am pleased to welcome everyone attending today, both here at Abbey House and remotely, to this second stage of the examination hearings.

In the interests of brevity, I will not repeat the points covered in my opening statement of June 2025, which is available in the examination library as [LPA23](#) and remains accessible online. Instead, I would like to express my appreciation to the Inspectors for the opportunity to resume these hearings.

Since we last met, significant progress has been made. Most notably, all Oxfordshire councils have now signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the scale of unmet housing need. We are pleased to confirm that there is now full agreement across the local planning authorities countywide both on the level of unmet need for Oxford to the year 2045 and that, collectively, provision is being made to accommodate it.

We reconvene at a time of considerable change within both the planning system and local government. Nationally, we continue to see evolving policy and legislative reform. With a new Prime Minister on the horizon, there is uncertainty about the content and timescales of the emerging new NPPF. We recognise that some participants may point to this uncertainty, particularly in relation to future housing requirements and pending national policy updates.

However, this plan falls within the transitional arrangements of the current NPPF - perhaps the only part of government policy we have certainty on currently - and is therefore being examined against the 2023 National Planning Policy Framework, its associated guidance, and its standard method housing numbers. The submitted plan meets, and indeed exceeds, those requirements as well as accommodating the agreed share of Oxford's unmet needs.

At the same time, we have already commenced work on Joint Local Plan 2, with a formal notice and timetable recently published. This enables us to respond proactively to future policy changes through the new plan-making framework. JLP2 will be prepared in accordance with the policy and housing requirements in force at that time, ensuring that any future changes in national direction can be addressed through the next plan rather than delaying progress on this one.

We also acknowledge the significant reforms proposed for local government. Current expectations are that South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will transition to new unitary arrangements in 2028, and the geography of those arrangements may become clearer over the summer. In parallel, work is progressing on new strategic planning structures, including Spatial Development Strategies, and there is the potential for additional plan-making bodies to emerge in future. While the geography and detail of these new bodies remains uncertain, they do not diminish the need for an up-to-date local plan in the meantime.

For that reason, we do not believe it would be appropriate or justified to pause this plan, delay progressing the JLP2, or defer plan-making pending future reforms. The purpose of these hearings is to complete the JLP1 examination process and move towards adoption of our first ever Joint Local Plan.

If you believe, as we do, and as the NPPF requires, in a plan-led system for making development management decisions, then there is every benefit to putting this up-to-date plan in place. It will bring unified policies between South and Vale, replacing the policies in our adopted plans from 2016, 2019 and 2020. This will provide certainty for communities, applicants and decision-makers, set a clear framework to deliver the planned growth, while enabling us, guided by the expertise of our talented policy planners and partners, to focus in JLP2 on the challenges and opportunities presented by the incoming wave of planning reforms.

Ultimately, this plan is about building sustainable communities for the future, and helping to create a better, healthier and more resilient future for the people and places we serve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to reintroduce this plan.