

Statement of Common Ground between

**Oxford City Council,
South Oxfordshire District Council, and
Vale of White Horse District Council**

Joint Local Plan 2041 Independent Examination

July 2026

**SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE AND VALE OF WHITE HORSE
JOINT LOCAL PLAN 2041 INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION**

STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND VERSION 2

between

(i) South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

and

(ii) Oxford City Council

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the second bilateral Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) prepared in relation to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041 (JLP), and its Independent Examination. It was agreed immediately following the Part 2 hearing sessions in July 2026.

1.2 It is agreed between

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council, and
Oxford City Council

Hereafter referred to as ‘the Parties’.

1.3 This SoCG supplements the previous SoCG between the Parties signed in July 2025¹, and reflects progress in developing the Oxford Local Plan, the removal of the Duty to Cooperate during the JLP examination, ongoing joint working between the parties since the last SoCG a year ago, and matters arising through the JLP examination process, including modifications proposed by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils.

1.4 This SoCG should be considered alongside the Joint Interim Statement of Common Ground for the Oxford Local Plan (January 2026)² and the Joint Memorandum of Understanding for the Oxford Local Plan 2045 (OLP, 2 July 2026)³ signed by the Parties alongside Cherwell District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council which address Oxford’s unmet housing need. This

¹ JLP Examination Library reference LPA38, available at <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2025/07/LPA38-AP5-SOCG-Oxford-SV.pdf>

² JLP Examination Library reference LPA41, Appendix 2, page 65, available at [LPA42_Note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation](#)

³ JLP Examination Library reference LPA76, available at <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2026/07/LPA76-Memorandum-of-Understanding-on-co-operating-to-meet-Oxfords-unmet-housing-need-July-2026.pdf>

SoCG focusses on other issues specific to South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Oxford.

- 1.5 The JLP was submitted for Examination on 9 December 2024. Part 1 hearing sessions, covering the Duty to Cooperate and other compliance matters were held from 3 to 5 June 2025.
- 1.6 Since then, the legal Duty to Cooperate test was removed on 25 March 2026 and the JLP is to be examined in line with the soundness test in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 'maintaining effective cooperation'.
- 1.7 Accordingly, this SoCG captures ongoing engagement between the Parties, and summarises the current position on matters agreed or not agreed by the Parties.

2. Scope and purpose of this Statement of Common Ground

- 2.1. The areas covered by this Statement are the districts of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, which are the areas covered by the JLP.
- 2.2. This statement forms part of the evidence base for the JLP and records the current positions of the Parties on key matters, including Oxford's unmet housing need and the JLP commitments to meet that need, together with the delivery and monitoring of those commitments. It also addresses matters relating to employment need, requirement and supply within the identified Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA), and infrastructure, including contributions relating to the Cowley Branch Line.
- 2.3. At the time of the bilateral SoCG between the Parties in July 2025 ([examination library reference LPA38](#)), unresolved issues included the level of Oxford's unmet housing need, provision towards addressing that need and monitoring its delivery, and employment need, requirement and supply within the identified Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA). Since then, work undertaken through preparation of the Oxford Local Plan 2045, the Oxfordshire Interim Statement of Common Ground of January 2026 ([examination library reference LPA69](#)), the Oxfordshire Memorandum of Understanding of July 2026 ([examination library reference](#)

[LPA76](#)) and engagements has resulted in greater alignment on the amount of Oxford's unmet housing need and apportionment, although differences remain on some other matters, addressed in this statement.

- 2.4. The parties have both engaged through the Development Plan Cooperation (DPC) Forum meetings (formerly known as Duty to Cooperate Forum), bilateral meetings, and Oxfordshire Planning Policy Officer (OPPO) meetings. The MOU at appendix 1 details the process which has been followed including the recent engagements and outcomes or actions in relation to Oxford's unmet housing need. The MOU also includes the Oxfordshire authorities local plan approaches, and the recent progression of Oxford's new local plan.

3. Matters of Common Ground

- 3.1. The Parties agree that engagement on the level of Oxford's unmet housing need has been ongoing since July 2025. South and Vale have included more information showing their perspective of engagement between the Parties on the JLP, which can be found in the Note on Maintaining Effective Cooperation⁴, the Oxfordshire MOU, the Councils' response to the Inspectors⁵ and the updated Log of Engagement in Appendix 1 of this SoCG, which records post-submission engagement up until June 2026, and the identified programme of ongoing work on issues including Oxford's unmet housing need.

Delivery of Oxford's unmet housing need:

- 3.2. Since the JLP's submission, work on the emerging OLP has culminated in the Oxfordshire MoU, which identifies an unmet housing need of 12,519 homes for Oxford over the period 2025-45. The parties don't expect this to change significantly ahead of the adoption of either the JLP or the OLP2045.

⁴ JLP Examination Library reference LPA42, available at <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2026/04/LPA42-Note-on-Maintaining-Effective-Cooperation.pdf>

⁵ JLP Examination Library reference LPA63 page 8, available at <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2026/05/LPA63-South-Oxfordshire-and-Vale-of-White-Horse-Councils-Response-to-Inspectors-Request.pdf>

- 3.3. The Parties agree that the Oxfordshire MOU sets out and records the shared understanding of the Oxfordshire authorities on Oxford's local housing need, housing capacity and resulting unmet housing need. The MOU also provides the basis for ongoing collaboration in relation to the identification and apportionment of Oxford's unmet housing need.
- 3.4. While the Parties agree on the scale of the JLP commitment towards Oxford's unmet need, Oxford City Council has concerns regarding the certainty of delivery, the absence of specifically identified sites associated with the commitment, and the monitoring arrangements relating to the delivery of Oxford's unmet housing need.
- 3.5. Oxford are concerned that there are no mechanisms for ensuring that the identified need will be delivered in time and in a way that meets Oxford's needs. The JLP includes the agreed level of unmet need in the overall housing requirement figure, but there is nothing else in the plan to ensure it is delivered at all for Oxford's needs. There are a number of policy approaches and mechanisms that the City Council considers could be introduced in order to ensure Oxford's unmet needs are met.
- 3.6. Oxford consider that, in addition to a headline figure, consideration of housing type, tenure, mix and location is needed. There are no site allocations specified as being for Oxford's unmet need; Oxford consider it is important that the unmet need is delivered on sites that are accessible to Oxford to have the benefits of sustainability that helped in some cases, to justify the release of Green Belt for this purpose. By considering specific sites as being for Oxford's unmet need, this ensures sites are in suitable locations and there can be consideration of whether there may be different needs for those sites which are not met by the general policy requirements of the Joint Plan in terms of mix and tenure split.
- 3.7. Both parties agree that it is important that the two signed Memoranda of Understanding regarding the operation for addressing the affordable housing element of Oxford City's unmet housing needs (examination library references [HES19](#) and [HES20](#)) continue between the councils to give nomination rights to

those on Oxford's housing register, and to enable consideration of what is the right tenure of affordable housing to meet needs.

- 3.8. Oxford consider that it is not possible to accurately assess the ways in which Oxford's unmet need will be delivered effectively over the plan period without knowing where the unmet need will be (or has been) delivered. This includes the number of completions and proposed delivery of allocations. It is not an effective policy to simply merge the unmet need with the overall needs of South and Vale. There is no separate trajectory, no consideration of whether this is deliverable in those years or the best way to address the need in the draft plan's timeframe, and with no bespoke approaches within any policy for those sites. Without any such mechanisms there can be no certainty that homes to address Oxford's unmet need can be delivered as planned.
- 3.9. Oxford also note that some important details and local context from allocated policies do not appear to be carried over, or have been diluted, for example how important it is for the new development and residents to feel part of Oxford, and also the opportunities for existing communities which need to be harnessed as part of the new development.
- 3.10. South and Vale do not agree that these delivery mechanism concerns are soundness issues for the JLP. Oxford's unmet need is explicitly incorporated within the housing requirement and referenced in the spatial strategy at Policy SP1. With the newly updated unmet need progressed through the development of Oxford's Local Plan, the JLP aligns with what is a coordinated Oxfordshire-wide strategy to meet Oxford's unmet need, supported through the Interim Statement of Common Ground and the Memorandum of Understanding. Much of the criticism focuses on the absence of separate trajectories, separate site labelling or separate monitoring arrangements. Neither national policy nor planning guidance requires those mechanisms, with case law supporting the holistic approach set out in the NPPF. The relevant test is whether unmet need has been planned for and can be delivered within the overall housing requirement. This approach is consistent with the adopted plans for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. This approach

is also consistent with the Housing Delivery Test benchmarking against the whole district housing requirement (including unmet need). Without material changes in circumstances, or a workable alternative proposal, South and Vale do not consider a change to the adopted approach is justified.

- 3.11. South and Vale prepare detailed 5 year land supply assessments that review all committed supply – both development plan allocations (local and neighbourhood plans) and windfall development. At least annually, the council will therefore prepare a detailed analysis of all sites without full detailed permission, including those with a stronger geographical relationship to Oxford. These 5 year housing land supply assessments analyse each site's current status, before engaging with the case officers in development management to create a detailed set of questions for the developer / promoter. These are amongst the most detailed / transparent analyses of land supply in the country. The councils therefore already have a strong monitoring process in place to consider how not only its own needs are being addressed, but also those of Oxford.
- 3.12. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils consider that the JLP's housing requirement and planned provision are capable of addressing these commitments. South and Vale consider that the JLP appropriately continues the established approach to meeting Oxford's unmet housing need, as embedded in the adopted local plans, whereby Oxford's unmet housing need forms part of the overall housing requirement and housing supply, and is monitored through district-wide housing delivery rather than being ring-fenced to specific sites or monitored separately.
- 3.13. The Parties further agree that South and Vale's proposed modification to amend the JLP plan period would improve alignment between the plans through a common 2025 base date, providing a more consistent basis for considering Oxford's housing need, capacity and unmet housing need across the two plans.
- 3.14. The Parties agree that there are no other unmet needs arising from the emerging Oxford Local Plan 2045.

3.15. The Parties agree to continue working together constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis through the established forums:

Oxfordshire Planning Policy Officers (OPPO) group

Development Plan Cooperation (DPC) Forum

Bilateral officer and member engagement

3.16. The Parties agree to work together to facilitate delivery of homes for Oxford's unmet need, including through ongoing engagement at the pre-application and planning application stage.

Employment need, requirement and supply within the identified FEMA:

3.17. The Parties agree that no cross-boundary unmet employment need has been identified through preparation of the Oxford Local Plan 2045 requiring redistribution to South Oxfordshire or Vale of White Horse.

3.18. Oxford consider that the housing growth within the JLP is not sufficient to keep pace with jobs growth. Oxford considers that the Joint Local Plan should plan for a higher level of housing growth derived from the new Standard Method and maintains concerns regarding the relationship between the Joint Local Plan's housing and employment evidence.

3.19. Oxford remains concerned that the JLP has planned for a very high level of employment growth without sufficient housing provision to support it. The concern is that unless properly planned for, this will likely lead to an exacerbation of existing problems such as in-commuting and in-affordability of housing. Oxford queries whether the impact of this approach has been properly assessed and mitigated, and whether the infrastructure needs and cross boundary impacts have been dealt with. If not, there is the additional possibility that the potential economic growth may in fact be curtailed by the lack of housing.

3.20. South and Vale do not agree that this is a soundness issue for the JLP. The suggestion that the Plan promotes economic growth without sufficient housing provision is not supported by the evidence. Housing need, employment growth,

infrastructure planning and Oxford's unmet need prepared and considered together throughout plan preparation. South and Vale consider that the evidence supporting the Joint Local Plan, including evidence submitted following the Stage 1 hearing sessions ([examination library reference LPA34](#)), provides an appropriate basis for assessing housing and employment growth and demonstrates an appropriate balance between homes and jobs across the plan area. South and Vale consider that the housing requirement includes both the Standard Method LHN, with the addition of Oxford's unmet need, as required by the NPPF. Labour markets operate across wider functional economic areas and not administrative boundaries, which is why the NPPF recognises the need for engagement across those areas. Likewise, commuting patterns already extend beyond district boundaries.

- 3.21. The Parties therefore agree that differences remain regarding housing and employment growth assumptions, the conclusions of the housing-employment balance evidence, and the implications of those assumptions for future infrastructure requirements.

Infrastructure

- 3.22. The Parties agree that there are no substantive cross-boundary infrastructure objections arising from the JLP. The Parties will continue to engage through existing forums, and both the plan-making and development management processes on strategic infrastructure matters of mutual interest, including the Cowley Branch Line (CBL) project.
- 3.23. Oxford City Council's position on the Cowley Branch Line (planned re-opening of Cowley Branch Line for passengers) is that it is a critical piece of transport infrastructure needed to support sustainable growth, particularly linked to major employment areas in Oxford. They strongly support its delivery because it would improve access to jobs, reduce car dependency and enable more sustainable commuting patterns from across Oxfordshire. At Regulation 19 stage, Oxford highlighted inconsistencies in approach to the CBL from the County Council between the OLP and the JLP. The County Council have been strong advocates

for the policy in the emerging Oxford Local Plan 2045 which would require financial contributions from trip-generating uses within a 1,500m buffer zone of the branch line, even though there is no such requirement on the South Oxfordshire side of the boundary.

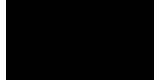
3.24. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse consider that Parties are in agreement about the benefits of the CBL, however the Joint Local Plan already aligns with that objective by continuing to direct substantial development to locations well connected to Oxford and via multiple, historic, and well-used sustainable transport networks, which aligns with the NPPF requirement to ensure coordination of infrastructure. S&V consider CBL to be a strategic infrastructure project with national funding and rail involvement, not something that has been dependent on JLP site allocations to bring forward. Planning obligations must be necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, directly related to the development and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind. The site allocations are justified based on housing need and sustainability, not to deliver or mitigate the need for CBL. South and Vale consider that CBL is not necessary to make those developments acceptable.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The Parties agree that significant progress has been made since the July 2025 Statement of Common Ground ([examination library reference LPA38](#)) through preparation of the OLP, the Oxfordshire Interim Statement of Common Ground, the Oxfordshire Memorandum of Understanding and ongoing engagement between the authorities.
- 4.2. The Parties agree on the scale of Oxford's housing need, housing capacity and resulting unmet housing need.
- 4.3. The Parties also agree that no cross-boundary unmet employment requirement has been identified arising from the OLP or the JLP. The Parties acknowledge that differences remain on certain matters, including the approach to housing and

employment delivery, housing-employment balance, and monitoring arrangements regarding commitments to Oxford's unmet housing need.

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

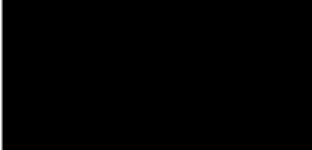
A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Tim Oruye.

Name: Tim Oruye

Position: Director of Policy and Programmes

Date: 13/07/2026

Signed on behalf of Oxford City Council

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Name: David Butler

Position: Director of Planning & Regulation

Date: 13/07/26

Appendix 1: Key meetings and information sharing regarding the Joint Local Plan since February 2026 (post LPA42)

Date	Type of engagement	Topic/s
16.03.26	Oxfordshire Duty to Cooperate Forum	All parties considered a first draft early 'skeleton' Memorandum of Understanding (MoU – a working title), focussing on Oxford's unmet housing need, identifying any gaps in the MoU, and discussing how these could be addressed collaboratively. This was an effective meeting for coming to resolutions about the scope and content of the MOU.
09.04.26	Bilateral meeting arranged by Oxford	Discussion about Reg 19 rep from South and Vale and SoCG relating to the OLP
01.05.26	Oxfordshire Development Plan Cooperation meeting	Discussion about skeleton Memorandum of Understanding, which included suggested edits to the MOU content and making tables more forward-looking.
21.05.26	Oxfordshire Development Plan Cooperation meeting	Apportionment of unmet need and draft Memorandum of Understanding
17.06.26	Bilateral meeting	Topics discussed: JLP status update, Review of previous positions including amount of unmet housing need, apportionment, location of development for Oxford in JLP, infrastructure and housing-employment alignment, S&V proposed modifications to JLP policies SP1, HOU1, HOU2 and JT1. Update bilateral JLP SoCG from previous July 2025 SoCG.
25.06.26	Oxfordshire Development Plan Cooperation meeting	Review of Memorandum of Understanding
29.06.26	Bilateral meeting	Review of JLP and OLP SoCGs to discuss proposed amendments. S&V and Oxford reviewed each section of the JLP SoCG (Oxford unmet housing need, employment need and supply, and infrastructure).
01.07.26	Oxfordshire Development Plan Cooperation meeting	Final review of Memorandum of Understanding

02.07.26	Exchange of correspondence	Signing of Memorandum of Understanding
02.07.26-13.07.26	Exchange of correspondence	Exchanges of drafts JLP SoCG and signing of JLP SoCG

Appendix 1 of the Oxfordshire Memorandum of Understanding ([examination library reference LPA76](#)) sets out further engagement as part of the agreed programme of work to develop a joint position on Oxford's unmet need.