

Q&A on the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Neighbourhood Planning

In July, the government published a decision that from 1 April 2028, the current Oxfordshire councils, plus West Berkshire will be replaced by three unitary authorities, Greater Oxford Council, Northern Oxfordshire Council and Ridgeway Council. A unitary council is one that provides district council and county council services in the area it covers. You can read more about this at 3councils.org.

Most towns and parishes within South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse will fall within the new Ridgeway Council area, with 34 parishes forming part of the new Greater Oxford Council area. A full list of all parishes in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, grouped by their future unitary authority, is provided in Appendix 1.

What does local government reorganisation (LGR) mean for neighbourhood plans that have already been made?

Neighbourhood plans that have already been made will continue to form part of the Development Plan for the areas they cover. This means they will continue to be used when planning applications are decided unless they are later replaced or revoked.

At present, district councils have a statutory duty to provide advice and assistance to communities preparing or reviewing neighbourhood plans. Once the new unitary authorities are established, this responsibility will transfer to the relevant successor authority. Communities will therefore continue to receive support from their current local planning authority until the new authorities are in place, after which time it will be the new unitary council providing advice.

Local government reorganisation does not mean communities need to prepare a new neighbourhood plan after it is implemented. Parish and town councils will remain in control of deciding whether to review their neighbourhood plan and what it should contain. Any review will continue to follow the statutory neighbourhood planning process, with support from the new unitary authority.

What if our neighbourhood plan is currently being prepared?

You should continue preparing your neighbourhood plan. There is currently no expectation that neighbourhood planning groups should pause work because of local government reorganisation.

Until responsibility transfers to the new unitary authorities (currently expected in April 2028), South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council will remain the

local planning authorities for their areas and will continue to carry out all statutory neighbourhood planning functions. This includes:

- providing advice and assistance to neighbourhood planning groups;
- undertaking statutory consultations;
- arranging independent examinations where required;
- organising referendums; and
- making neighbourhood plans where all statutory requirements have been met.

Most neighbourhood plans currently being prepared are expected to complete the statutory process before the new unitary authorities are created. If a neighbourhood plan is still in progress when responsibility transfers, the relevant successor unitary authority will take over responsibility from the district council for supporting the plan and progressing it through the remaining statutory stages.

Neighbourhood plans will continue to be prepared against the adopted Local Plan that applies to their area. Following local government reorganisation, the new unitary authorities will continue to use the existing adopted Local Plans until they are replaced by new local plans covering their administrative areas.

My Parish will be moving into Greater Oxford council, will this affect our neighbourhood plan?

No. Local government reorganisation does not, by itself, change the status of your neighbourhood plan or require you to prepare a new one. Most parishes in South and Vale will fall under Ridgeway Council, but some parishes (see [map](#) produced by House of Commons Library) currently in South or Vale will become part of the Greater Oxford Council. For these parishes, the main change is that the new Greater Oxford authority will become your local planning authority when responsibility transfers to the new unitary authorities (currently expected to be 1 April 2028), taking over responsibility for supporting neighbourhood planning and exercising the statutory neighbourhood planning functions currently carried out by the district council.

What if our neighbourhood area will be split between two new authorities?

Some neighbourhood areas may, in future, cross the boundary between two new unitary authorities. In the short term, the practical implications are likely to be limited. If a neighbourhood plan has already been made, it will continue to form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area it covers (in both future authorities) unless it is later replaced or revoked.

Once established, the new authorities will initially continue to use the existing adopted Local Plans that apply to their areas. Over time, however, each new authority is likely to prepare and adopt a new Local Plan. Where a new Local Plan conflicts with part of an existing neighbourhood plan, the more recent Local Plan policy will take precedence.

Should a neighbourhood planning group covering an area that, in future, falls within two different unitary authority areas decide to review its neighbourhood plan, it should consider whether to:

- retain the existing neighbourhood area and prepare a plan that responds to the Local Plan applying to each part of the area; or
- seek to revise the neighbourhood area boundary so that it better reflects the new local authority boundaries.

There will be no automatic requirement to change a neighbourhood area or review a neighbourhood plan solely because it falls within two different unitary authority areas. Where a neighbourhood area is affected, the relevant authorities will work with the parish or town council to explain the options and support it in deciding the most appropriate way forward.

Should we continue reviewing our neighbourhood plan?

Yes. If your community is considering reviewing its neighbourhood plan, there is no need to delay solely because of local government reorganisation.

Until the new unitary authorities are established, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council will continue to provide advice and assistance and carry out all statutory neighbourhood planning functions. If responsibility transfers to a new unitary authority while your review is underway, the new council will take over from the district council in supporting your neighbourhood plan and continue the statutory process from that point.

When deciding whether to review a neighbourhood plan, parish and town councils should continue to consider the planning issues affecting their area and whether the plan remains up to date. Local government reorganisation, in itself, should not determine whether a review is needed.

Will the new unitary councils have different Local Plans?

Not immediately.

The adopted Local Plans for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse will continue to apply over the area the local plan covered when it was adopted. In the meantime, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council will continue to progress the emerging Joint Local Plan (JLP1) through the statutory examination process. The councils are also continuing to prepare Joint Local Plan 2 (JLP2) through a twin-tracking approach, as required under the Government's new plan-making system.

When the new unitary authorities are established, the Local Plans that are in force at that time will continue to apply unless and until they are replaced by new Local Plans. This means there will be no immediate change to the planning policy against which neighbourhood plans are prepared or planning applications are determined.

Over time, each new unitary authority is expected to prepare a Local Plan that reflects the needs and priorities of its area. As new Local Plans are adopted, they will become the relevant planning policy for neighbourhood plans within those areas.

Communities preparing or reviewing a neighbourhood plan should continue to have regard to the Development Plan and national planning policy that apply at the time they are preparing their plan.

If your neighbourhood area will fall within more than one new unitary authority, there may be additional considerations when reviewing your neighbourhood plan in the future. Please see the FAQ "What if our neighbourhood area will be split between two new authorities?"

What should neighbourhood planning groups do now?

Our advice is simple:

- continue preparing your neighbourhood plan;
- continue reviewing your existing neighbourhood plan where appropriate;
- continue working with your neighbourhood planning officer; and
- continue planning on the basis of the current Development Plan and national planning policy.

Local government reorganisation does not change the status of neighbourhood plans or the role of parish and town councils in neighbourhood planning. At this stage, there is no need to alter your programme or delay work. We will continue to support neighbourhood planning groups throughout the transition and keep communities informed as further details become available.

Will support from district council officers change?

Not at this stage.

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council will continue to provide advice and assistance to neighbourhood planning groups and carry out all statutory neighbourhood planning functions until responsibility transfers to the new unitary authorities.

Once the new authorities are established, they will take on these responsibilities and become the local planning authorities for neighbourhood planning in their areas. We will work closely with neighbourhood planning groups to ensure a smooth transition and will keep communities informed of any changes well in advance.

We recognise that local government reorganisation creates uncertainty, particularly for communities investing significant time and effort in preparing or reviewing neighbourhood plans.

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council remain fully committed to supporting neighbourhood planning throughout the transition.

We will continue to provide advice and assistance, carry out our statutory neighbourhood planning responsibilities, and work closely with neighbourhood planning groups until responsibility transfers to the new unitary authorities.

We are committed to making that transition as smooth as possible. We will keep neighbourhood planning groups informed as further information becomes available and continue to provide clear, timely advice so communities can progress their neighbourhood plans with confidence.

If you would like to discuss any of the above, please contact the neighbourhood planning team at **01235 422422** or by email at **planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk**.

The Neighbourhood Planning Team
August 2026

Appendix 1: Parishes by Future Unitary Authorities

Parishes in South Oxfordshire

To Ridgeway

- Adwell
- Aston Rowant
- Aston Tirrold
- Aston Upthorpe
- Benson
- Berrick Salome
- Binfield Heath
- Bix and Assendon
- Brightwell Baldwin
- Brightwell-cum-Sotwell
- Britwell Salome
- Chalgrove
- Checkendon
- Chinnor
- Cholsey
- Crowell
- Crowmarsh
- Cuxham with Easington
- Didcot
- East Hagbourne
- Ewelme
- Eye and Dunsden
- Goring Heath
- Goring-on-Thames
- Great Haseley
- Harpsden
- Henley-on-Thames
- Highmoor
- Ipsden
- Kidmore End
- Lewknor
- Little Wittenham
- Long Wittenham
- Mapledurham
- Moulsoford
- Nettlebed
- Newington
- North Moreton
- Nuffield
- Pishill with Stonor
- Pyrton
- Rotherfield Greys
- Rotherfield Peppard
- Shiplake
- Shirburn
- Sonning Common
- South Moreton
- South Stoke
- Stoke Row
- Stoke Talmage
- Swyncombe
- Sydenham
- Tetsworth
- Thame
- Tiddington-with-Albury
- Towersey
- Wallingford
- Watlington
- West Hagbourne
- Wheatfield
- Whitchurch-on-Thames
- Woodcote

To Greater Oxford

- Beckley and Stowood
- Berinsfield
- Clifton Hampden
- Cuddesdon and Denton
- Culham
- Dorchester
- Drayton St. Leonard
- Elsfield
- Forest Hill with Shotover
- Garsington
- Great Milton
- Holton
- Horspath
- Little Milton
- Marsh Baldon
- Nuneham Courtenay
- Sandford-on-Thames
- Stadhampton
- Stanton St. John
- Toot Baldon
- Warborough
- Waterperry with Thomley
- Waterstock
- Wheatley
- Woodeaton

Parishes in Vale of White Horse

To Ridgeway

- Abingdon on Thames
- Appleford-on-Thames
- Ardington
- Ashbury
- Baulking
- Blewbury
- Bourton
- Buckland
- Buscot
- Charney Bassett
- Childrey
- Chilton
- Coleshill
- Compton Beauchamp
- Denchworth
- Drayton
- East Challow
- East Hanney
- East Hendred
- Eaton Hastings
- Fernham
- Frilford
- Fyfield and Tubney
- Garford
- Goosey
- Great Coxwell
- Great Faringdon
- Grove
- Harwell
- Hatford
- Hinton Waldrist
- Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor
- Kingston Lisle
- Letcombe Bassett
- Letcombe Regis
- Little Coxwell
- Littleworth
- Lockinge
- Longcot
- Longworth
- Lyford
- Marcham
- Milton
- Pusey
- Radley
- Shellingford
- Shrivenham
- Sparsholt
- St. Helen Without
- Stanford in the Vale
- Steventon
- Sutton Courtenay
- Uffington
- Upton
- Wantage
- Watchfield
- West Challow
- West Hanney
- West Hendred
- Western Valley
- Woolstone

To Greater Oxford

- Appleton-with-Eaton
- Besselsleigh
- Botley and North Hinksey
- Cumnor
- Kennington
- South Hinksey
- Sunningwell
- Wootton
- Wytham