

# Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: All

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To: Vale Cabinet, 18 September 2024

To: Vale Council, 18 September 2024

South Cabinet member responsible:

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To: South Cabinet, 19 September 2024

To: South Council, 19 September 2024

## Joint Local Plan 2041 – Approval of Publication Version and Next Steps

### Recommendations

#### Cabinet to Recommend to Council:

- (a) that the Joint Local Plan 2041 Publication Version (Appendix 1), Proposed Joint Local Plan Policies Map Publication Version (Appendix 2) and supporting documents be made available for a six-week period under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- (b) following the six-week period, to authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes, in consultation with the South Cabinet member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes, to submit the Joint Local Plan 2041 Publication Version and all associated documents, together with a Statement including how the responses to the Preferred Options Joint Local Plan have been taken into account and a summary of the main issues raised in the publication stage responses, to the Secretary of State for independent examination under Regulation 22 of the Town

and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

- (c) to authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the South Cabinet member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes, to make non-material changes and corrections to the Joint Local Plan 2041 and supporting documents, to address editorial, typographical and grammatical errors, up to the publicity period
- (d) to authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the South Cabinet member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes, to propose changes and corrections to the Joint Local Plan 2041 and supporting documents, including policy updates, editorial, typographical and grammatical errors, during and following the publicity period, plan submission and during examination
- (e) to authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes, once the Joint Local Plan 2041 has been submitted for examination, to invite the examining Inspector(s) to recommend any modifications they consider to be necessary in accordance with section 20(7C) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- (f) To approve the Joint Local Development Scheme (August 2024), attached at Appendix 3.

<b>Implications (further detail within the report)</b>	<b>Financial</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Climate and Ecological</b>	<b>Equality and diversity</b>
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Signing off officer</b>	<b>James Ticehurst</b>	<b>Vivien Williams</b>	<b>Jessie Fieth</b>	<b>Abi Witting</b>

## Purpose of report

1. To summarise the progress made to date with preparation of the Joint Local Plan, including explaining how comments raised during previous public consultations and internal consultation have influenced its structure and content.
2. To brief Cabinet on the recommendations for Council, which includes agreement that the Joint Local Plan 2041 Publication Version can be published for the purposes of formal Publication (Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012), and thereafter submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination (under Regulation 22), together with the Proposed Joint Local Plan Policies Map (Publication Version 2024), all supporting technical evidence, topic papers and summaries of publication responses received, subject to further non-material changes and corrections authorised by the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the lead portfolio members, and any other proposed changes and corrections authorised by the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the lead portfolio members, and to authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes, after submission, to invite the examining Inspector(s) to recommend any modifications to the Joint Local Plan 2041 that may be required.

## Corporate objectives

3. The key themes for the Joint Local Plan have been identified from, and inspired by, the main planning issues and priorities set out in the councils' Corporate Plans. These themes are:

- Reducing Carbon Emissions
- Nature Recovery and Landscape
- Protecting and Enhancing Local Heritage
- Thriving Inclusive Communities
- Transport and Facilities
- Health Lifestyles and Safe Communities
- Jobs and Opportunities for Innovation

4. The vision outlined in the Joint Local Plan Publication document is:

*Our vision is for carbon neutral districts, for current and future generations.*

*For this to be a place where nature is thriving, and nature reserves are no longer isolated pockets. A place where history is still visible, where heritage and landscape character are safeguarded and valued, and the beauty and the distinctive local identity of our countryside, towns and villages have been enhanced.*

*A place where people can thrive. Where people have housing choices they can afford, where villages, market towns and garden communities are diverse and inclusive places where people of all ages and backgrounds can live together.*

*A place where residents can reach the facilities they need for everyday living on foot, bicycle, wheeling, public transport or by zero-emission and low carbon transport choices.*

*Where residents and visitors can live healthy lifestyles and access greenspace. Where people are safe from pollution, flooding, and the effects of climate change.*

*Where there are valuable and rewarding jobs, embracing clean technologies, and growing the opportunities in Science Vale for the districts to contribute on a national and international scale to solving pressing global issues.*

## Background

5. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are working together to produce a Joint Local Plan. Local planning authorities must prepare their local plan, setting planning policies for their area, in a manner consistent with national policy, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). The government is currently consulting on changes to the NPPF, although under the proposed transition arrangements, it is probable that the Joint Local Plan would be examined under the

existing NPPF (December 2023 – ‘2023 edition’).

6. The Joint Local Development Scheme<sup>1</sup> (LDS) highlights the process for consultation on the Joint Local Plan. There have thus far been two formal public consultation stages that have informed the preparation of the Joint Local Plan:
  - an initial ‘Issues’ consultation, which was undertaken between 12 May to 23 June 2022
  - a Preferred Options (Regulation 18) consultation, which was undertaken between 10 January to 26 February 2024
7. In accordance with the Joint LDS, the councils intend to publish the Joint Local Plan for Public (Regulation 19) in October 2024. This is an updated timetable from the earlier Joint LDS (September 2023) with a shorter timetable to achieve submission in order to allow the councils to maintain progress on preparation of the Joint Local Plan 2041 in the context of existing Government policy in the NPPF (2023 edition). The Publication stage differs from previous consultations and forms the first step in the process of examining the Joint Local Plan (albeit the examination itself does not begin until the Joint Local Plan has been submitted). Any comments made at the Publication stage are considered by the examining Inspector rather than the Council. The councils do not need to formally respond to them before submission (but should summarise the main issues raised), although doing so during the examination is considered helpful and could assist the examining Inspector.
8. The councils can make minor clarifications or corrections following Regulation 19 publication as proposed modifications to be presented to the Inspector at the point of submission of the plan, which this report seeks to delegate to the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the South Cabinet member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes. The councils should not make major policy changes to the Local Plan following Regulation 19 unless they choose to delay the plan submission and consult on an addendum of major changes, or a new Regulation 19 document. This could happen if a significant and / or unforeseen matter(s) arose through or during the Publication stage.
9. Following publication, the councils will submit the plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination, together with the supporting technical evidence and reports. The supporting material will include a Statement explaining what representations were made to the Preferred Options version and how they were taken into account in the preparation of the Joint Local Plan 2041 and a summary of the main issues raised in any representations made during the Publication stage.
10. The councils intend to submit the Joint Local Plan to the Secretary of State in December 2024. As set out in the councils’ Joint LDS, it is anticipated that the Joint Local Plan will be examined in April 2025 with adoption by December 2025, although all dates post-submission are set by the Planning Inspectorate and therefore subject to change.
11. Following the examination hearing sessions, the Local Plan Inspector(s), if invited to do so by the councils, may recommend changes (main modifications) to the Joint

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<sup>1</sup> South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local Development Scheme, published August 2024. Available at: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Accessible-Joint-LDS-August-24-.pdf>

Local Plan, which may be necessary for them to find the plan ‘sound’ and thus capable of adoption. The Main Modifications to the Joint Local Plan would be published for public consultation, alongside any minor modifications the councils propose. Following this stage, the Joint Local Plan could be finalised and adopted.

## **Feedback from the Preferred Options Consultation**

12. The Preferred Options consultation of the Joint Local Plan closed on 26 February 2024. There were two main ways people were able to get involved in the consultation; through taking part in the main consultation survey, or via a shorter ‘Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell’ survey, designed to be faster and simpler to respond to. This approach to consultation generated comments from over 1,250 respondents. The response to the consultation was very positive with most questions generating results showing the majority of respondents either supported or strongly supported the Councils’ preferred options. The Councils held a number of innovative drop-in events across the districts, and this work led to the councils to receiving a Highly Commended award at the Planning Resource Awards 2024. A full Statement will be published alongside the Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan. The Statement includes a detailed breakdown of all comments made in the Preferred Options consultation and the councils’ response to them. Some of the main feedback that arose from the Preferred Options consultation can be summarised as follows:

- respondents generally supported the policies proposed as part of the Preferred Options consultation. In many cases, respondents expressed a preference for the councils’ preferred option (Option A) for a policy topic
- there was acknowledgement of and support for the council's ambitious approach to some policies, particularly relating to addressing climate, protecting the environment and enhancing biodiversity, delivering different types of affordable housing, supporting the districts’ rural communities and promoting high quality design. Nonetheless, some respondents raised viability and deliverability challenges associated with ambitious targets
- some respondents raised concern about the impact of new development, particularly where new development is relied upon to deliver much needed infrastructure. Many respondents did not feel that existing infrastructure is sufficient, or had concerns about the quantum and/or timescales associated with delivering infrastructure. There was support for policy requirements for different infrastructure, particularly where it is delivered in specific locations with need
- respondent’s views on housing and employment need were mixed; many supported the councils’ approach to calculating and addressing housing and employment need, whilst others disagreed and thought a different approach was necessary
- whilst there were objections to housing allocations, it was acknowledged that these are carried over allocations and respondents supported where changes had been proposed to reduce the nature, scale and/or location of development and prioritise brownfield sites. There was support for the Garden Village proposals and delivery of high-quality development, particularly where it contributes to the regeneration of Berinsfield. Site promoters provided detailed comments against relevant policies to pick up on site specific points, either in support or objection to the preferred options

- on the whole, responses from statutory consultees were positive, highlighting support for policies across the board. In some instances, there were some areas of concern or objection, which consultees suggested could be addressed by ongoing collaborative working on policy development and/or the development of strategic allocation proposals.

## **Summary of the Joint Local Plan document and changes to previous versions**

13. The Joint Local Plan document sets the strategy for growth in the districts up to 2041. It includes 105 policies covering site allocations, and strategic and development management policies set out in the following chapters:
- Chapter 1: Introduction
  - Chapter 2: About the Districts
  - Chapter 3: Vision and Objectives
  - Chapter 4: Climate Change
  - Chapter 5: Spatial Strategy and Settlements
  - Chapter 6: Housing
  - Chapter 7: Jobs and Tourism
  - Chapter 8: Site Allocations
  - Chapter 9: Town Centres and Retail
  - Chapter 10: Well-designed Places for our Communities
  - Chapter 11: Healthy Places
  - Chapter 12: Nature Recovery, Heritage, and Landscape
  - Chapter 13: Infrastructure, Transport, Connectivity and Communications
  - Monitoring Framework
  - Appendices and Policies Map
14. The Preferred Options consultation version of the plan included a number of policy options for consideration. The Joint Local Plan Publication Version has considered the representations made during the Preferred Options consultation phase and has refined the policies to the final versions included in the plan now. Appendix 4 outlines the main changes made between the Preferred Options and Publication Versions of the Joint Local Plan.

## **How the Joint Local Plan meets the soundness tests**

15. Paragraph 35 of the NPPF (2023 edition) sets out the requirement for Local Plans to be prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements and to be 'sound'. Plans are considered sound if they are: a) positively prepared; b) justified; c) effective; and d) consistent with national policy. The councils consider the draft Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan meets these requirements, as set out in turn below.

**a) a positively prepared plan**

16. The NPPF (2023 edition) states that local plans should be prepared *“providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development”* (paragraph 35(a)).
17. The councils’ Joint Local Plan is positively prepared, proposing to meet objectively assessed needs in full, as set out in the current published standard method figures, which are 579 homes a year for South Oxfordshire and 633 homes a year for Vale of White Horse. In preparing the Joint Local Plan, the councils have worked, and continue to work, in partnership with their neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Cooperate. The Duty to Cooperate set out in the Localism Act 2011 is both a legal duty and test of effective plan-making. It requires cooperation on issues of common concern in order to develop sound plans. On top of the area’s own needs, the Joint Local Plan continues to plan to accommodate the unmet housing needs from Oxford City that were agreed through the adopted local plans.
18. The councils have and will continue to undertake a process of Sustainability Appraisal (see Appendix 5) to ensure that the Joint Local Plan continues to deliver sustainable development.
19. The plan identifies site allocations and policies to fully meet the housing requirement set out in the plan, based on the Government’s current Standard Method for calculating future housing requirements, plus an uplift to account for the existing unmet need from Oxford City that was agreed through the last local plans for South and Vale. This is not a joint housing requirement; each district will measure its own supply against its own requirement. The housing requirements and employment needs for the districts are outlined in the following Joint Local Plan policies:
  - Policy HOU1: Housing requirement
  - Policy JT1: Meeting employment needs
20. Policy HOU1 of the Joint Local Plan confirms the housing numbers to be delivered within each district during the plan period (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2041), which are:
  - South Oxfordshire housing requirement: 16,530 homes
  - Vale of White Horse housing requirement: 14,490 homes
21. The above figures incorporate an Oxford City unmet need of 4,950 homes for South and 1,830 homes for Vale, as identified in Oxford City Council’s Local Plan 2036. No further homes are included in the requirement to accommodate any newly identified unmet need from Oxford City, which is currently unconfirmed and in the process of being examined for soundness as part of the Oxford City’s Local Plan 2040.

**b) a justified plan**

22. The NPPF (2023 edition) states that local plans should be *“an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence”* (paragraph 35(b)).

23. The Joint Local Plan sets out a spatial strategy for the distribution of growth across the districts (Policy SP1: Spatial Strategy). The plan was informed by a detailed understanding of the issues facing the districts, a detailed range of evidence, and national planning policy and guidance.
24. The plan has also been informed by other plans and strategies, including the Councils' Corporate Plans and some more detailed strategies developed alongside this process (such as the Councils' Leisure Facilities Strategy, Playing Pitch Strategy, Climate Action Plan, Green Infrastructure Strategy), along with Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, neighbourhood plans, and other programmes of the district, town and parish councils, neighbouring authorities and other organisations, such as the emerging Nature Recovery Strategy and the National Landscape (formerly AONB) Management Plans. The Joint Local Plan will help to facilitate the delivery of many of the aspirations and objectives set out in these other plans and strategies.
25. A series of reasonable alternatives were developed and considered to inform the Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan. These reasonable alternatives have been assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process.

**c) an effective plan**

26. The NPPF (2023 edition) states that local plans should be *“deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground”* (paragraph 35(c)).
27. To ensure that the Joint Local Plan forms a realistic, deliverable, and viable plan, there has been close cooperation with landowners and developers to confirm that the sites allocated in the Joint Local Plan are both genuinely available and deliverable within the plan period. A Viability Study has been prepared alongside the Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan to support this. Statements of Common Ground are being prepared to support the plan at submission and examination.
28. The councils have worked closely with statutory organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, Highways England, Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council, who are responsible for providing or managing key services, such as water resources, education, and transport.
29. By its very nature, the Joint Local Plan seeks to effectively address cross-boundary strategic matters by establishing policy to be applied across two adjoining districts (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse). In addition, preparation of the plan has included joint working with other partners to ensure proper sustainable planning can be achieved across administrative boundaries.

**d) a plan that is consistent with national policy**

30. The test on consistency with national policy is that local plans are sound if they are *“enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.”* (NPPF (2023 edition) paragraph 35d).
31. The version of the Framework that the Joint Local Plan will be examined under will be determined by the date when it is submitted and the timing of the publication of a



revised NPPF (expected later in 2024). Under the transition arrangements in the consultation version of the NPPF, it is probable that the Joint Local Plan would be examined under the existing NPPF (2023 edition). The likely implications of not being examined under the existing NPPF (2023 edition) are set out in the Options section below.

32. The Joint Local Plan has been designed very much with the delivery of sustainable development as a golden thread. The preparation of the Joint Local Plan has involved the testing of reasonable alternatives through an iterative process of Sustainability Appraisal (SA), undertaken by independent specialists for the Councils. The SA incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and is available at Appendix 5 to this report. The Joint Local Plan is also supported by a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Stage 1 Screening Report, which is available at Appendix 6 of this report. The councils are in the process of finalising the HRA Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, which will be submitted for examination alongside the Joint Local Plan.

## **Supporting documents**

33. As mentioned, the preparation of the Joint Local Plan has been informed by technical evidence which will be published alongside the plan for the Regulation 19 publication. The proposed list of supporting evidence documents for publication is included in Appendix 7 of this report.
34. In addition, topic papers have been prepared to outline the councils' approach to preparing particular elements of the plan. Topic papers were published at the Regulation 18 consultation stage and will be updated and submitted to inform the examination of the Joint Local Plan, as listed in Appendix 8.

## **Regulation 19 publication format**

35. The preparation of the Joint Local Plan has involved close collaboration across council service teams. In particular, a comprehensive approach has been taken to communications and community engagement for the Joint Local Plan. The Regulation 19 publicity period will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant regulatory requirements alongside the councils' Statement of Community Involvement, which includes the distribution of paper copies of the plan and key evidence documents at locations across the districts and accessible versions available upon request. Going above and beyond a more conventional pdf version of the Joint Local Plan, the proposal is to offer an interactive digital version of the plan using the ArcGIS Storymap format used for the previous successful Joint Local Plan consultations, which were very well received.
36. Publication of the Regulation 19 plan will follow the necessary process outlined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, which will include publication of the relevant documents online and available for inspection at locations across the districts. The councils will seek representations on the legal compliance and soundness of the plan and whether they are felt to have complied with the Duty to Cooperate. Representations can be made either electronically or in writing over a six-week period. Following the end of the publicity period, the responses will be submitted to the Secretary of State for inspection and consideration as part of the Joint

Local Plan examination, together with a statement reporting on the number of representations made and a summary of the main issues raised. The representations will also be published on the councils' websites.

## Options

37. The councils have followed a comprehensive approach to plan preparation. The plan has been informed by technical evidence, formal consultation stages, informal stakeholder engagement, and Sustainability Appraisal. As such, alternative options for strategy, policy and site allocations have been considered to arrive at the final Regulation 19 Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan. The Joint Local Plan Publication Version therefore represents the best option to deliver against the councils' strategic objectives.
38. From a wider context, there are some changes to the planning system and government planning policy on the horizon, including the newly published consultation on a revised NPPF document, which runs until 24 September 2024. The proposed draft NPPF includes changes to existing planning policy, most notable of which are changes to:
- housing supply and targets, including the proposal of a new method for calculating housing need (Local Housing Need) and the removal of the five-year land supply exemption in instances where adopted plans are less than five years old,
  - affordable housing requirements, including the requirement for policies to identify a minimum proportion of social rent homes and for tenure mix to be led by identified local needs,
  - climate change requirements, including support for proposals for all forms of renewable and low-carbon development, with weight given to proposals that contribute to a net zero future,
  - design methodology and the removal of references to authority-wide design codes,
  - Green Belt review and definition, requiring all local planning authorities to review their Green Belt boundaries during local plan preparation in exceptional circumstances, such as meeting an identified need for housing or other development. The new NPPF also introduces a new definition of Grey Belt to guide where revisions to Green Belt boundaries should take place; development in Grey Belt should then be considered appropriate in certain instances,
  - development management policies, particularly relating to the required provision of at least 50 per cent affordable housing on housing schemes (subject to viability).
39. The proposed draft NPPF includes provisions for transitional arrangements where plans are in the process of being prepared. These would come into effect within one month of the final publication of the NPPF (timescales currently unknown but expected before the end of 2024). These arrangements are applied differentially depending on the progress of an emerging plan, and the variation between the emerging annual housing requirement and the new Local Housing Need figure. For many plans at earlier stages or with a larger difference of more than 200 homes a year compared with the proposed new figures, plans will need to be revised to apply to the new NPPF

and associated Local Housing Need figure and submitted for examination within 18 months. In accordance with these transition arrangements, plans can continue to examination under the current NPPF (2023 edition) if:

- a) There is a difference of less than 200 homes a year between the emerging plan at Regulation 19 stage and the proposed new Local Housing Need figure.
- b) In instances where there is a difference of more than 200 homes between the two figures, plans can proceed to examination under the current NPPF (2023 edition) if they are submitted for examination within a month of the final new NPPF publication. Councils with plans examined and adopted under the current NPPF (2023 edition) are expected to commence plan making in the new plan making system at the earliest opportunity.

40. The Joint Local Plan would qualify under transitional arrangement (b), if submitted to the Secretary of State for examination within one month of the new NPPF being published.
41. The councils could choose to delay progressing the Joint Local Plan until a later date once the new NPPF is published. However, this would require largely restarting the whole local plan process, which would cost significant time and money. A delay of this nature would extend the timescale for adoption of the Joint Local Plan, which could have wider implications for planning and development management in both districts. By completing the Joint Local Plan, the councils will be able to progress to the next plan whilst having an adopted plan that is less than five years old and being monitored against the housing requirement figure in the Joint Local Plan, which will help maintain the councils' five-year housing land supply.
42. The councils recognise that upon adoption of the Joint Local Plan examined under the current NPPF (2023 edition), the government have indicated that they will expect councils to commence work on a new local plan under the new plan making system, which is likely to be in place by then, to reflect the new NPPF and national policy directions, such as the proposed future housing numbers, which are likely to be higher. Commencing such a review early in the life of an adopted local plan is the councils normal approach to plan making and will enable the councils' to take account of any new strategic planning arrangements that may be forthcoming from national government.
43. Progressing with the emerging Joint Local Plan now provides an opportunity to put a set of harmonised policies in place for South and Vale, which will apply to developments coming forward in the interim, including on our large strategic allocation sites. With this in mind, the councils firmly believe the Joint Local Plan delivers for local communities. It updates environmental standards and the infrastructure package of sites that are already allocated but are yet to receive planning permission. Delaying and potentially restarting the Joint Local Plan at this stage would likely result in development coming forward which does not align with the councils' strategic objectives, and which meets policy requirements from several years ago.
44. Proceeding to submission under the transition arrangements is recommended to avoid these implications, although it should be noted that there are risks in doing so.

## **Financial Implications**

45. The next stage of the Joint Local Plan process, including the costs associated with Regulation 19 publication and the Examination, can be funded from within existing planning policy budget.
46. A Joint Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) has been prepared as part of the evidence for the Joint Local Plan. The Joint IDP sets out the updated infrastructure requirements associated with the sites allocated in the plan, including the forecasted financial contributions associated with, and who is responsible for, delivering the IDP requirements. This information has been used to support the viability assessment of the plan, to ensure the proposals included are deliverable in accordance with the tests of soundness outlined above.

## **Legal Implications**

47. It is a legal requirement for local planning authorities to produce a local plan and keep it up to date. Once adopted, the Joint Local Plan will replace the existing Local Plans for both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils as the basis for development management decision-making in the districts.
48. All aspects of the Joint Local Plan preparation have been undertaken in accordance with the relevant planning legislation and regulations.
49. The councils may not submit the Joint Local Plan 2041 for examination unless they have complied with all applicable regulatory requirements and they think it is ready for independent examination, which in essence means they consider it is capable of being found sound and is legally compliant. It is considered that these requirements are met by the contents of the Joint Local Plan 2041 and the processes that have been followed during its preparation.

## **Climate and ecological impact implications**

50. The Corporate Plans have inspired the key themes and direction of the Joint Local Plan which has been shaped by recognising that the councils have a commitment and a duty to tackle the climate emergency, reduce carbon emissions and deliver nature's recovery.
51. Addressing the climate and ecological emergencies is a golden thread that runs throughout the proposed policies in the Joint Local Plan. By raising policy standards, for example on net zero carbon and biodiversity net gain, development in the districts will come forward in a more sustainable way when the Joint Local Plan is in place than under the adopted local plans. To develop the new policies, a net zero carbon study was commissioned to assess the options available within the local planning system to achieve net zero carbon development. In addition, a number of technical studies have been completed to provide a firm evidence base underpinning the policies designed to protect and restore nature in the districts.
52. The plan contains the following policies designed to improve and address these challenges, which will be consulted on as part of the Regulation 19 publicity period:

- CE1: Sustainable design and construction
- CE2: Net zero carbon buildings
- CE3: Reducing embodied carbon
- CE4: Sustainable retrofitting
- CE5: Renewable energy
- CE6: Flood risk and drainage
- CE7: Water efficiency
- CE8: Water quality and wastewater infrastructure
- CE9: Air quality
- CE10: Pollution sources and receptors
- NH1: Biodiversity designations
- NH2: Nature recovery
- NH3: Trees and hedgerows in the landscape
- NH4: Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes (formerly AONBs)
- NH5: Landscape
- NH13: Historic environment and climate change
- IN2: Sustainable transport and accessibility

53. Through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process (see Appendix 5), the impacts of every policy have been explored and assessed to help ensure that the Joint Local Plan continues to deliver sustainable development. Because of this detailed SA process, together with the multi-topic nature of the Joint Local Plan, the climate team has confirmed that the Climate Impact Assessment Tool is not required in addition for this decision.

## **Equalities implications**

54. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been prepared as part of the evidence base to support the Joint Local Plan. This has included testing all policies against a range of agreed criteria to determine the impact they would have on different groups within the community.

55. On the whole, all policies in the Joint Local Plan would deliver a positive impact for residents collectively. However, some policies differentially impact different groups within the community when considering the nine protected characteristics, rural communities and areas of deprivation. Where groups are differentially impacted, these are mostly positive impacts.

56. There is only one instance where the EqIA identifies a mixed impact that will need to be monitored. This relates to Policy SP1: Spatial Strategy, which directs new development towards the most built-up settlements in the district. This strategy positively impacts rural communities but may result in more negative impacts from directing the infrastructure and services associated with new development towards more built-up settlements. Nonetheless, Policy SP1 allows for some mitigation by

encouraging neighbourhood planning groups to address the needs of local communities and will continue to be monitored for its impact.

## **Risks**

57. This report will be considered separately by South and Vale Cabinets and Councils, so in order to progress with the Regulation 19 publicity period and subsequent submission of the Joint Local Plan, there is a requirement for approval from both councils.
58. If the councils do not proceed with commencing Regulation 19 on the Joint Local Plan in accordance with the timescales set out in the Joint LDS, they will not be able to meet the plan preparation timetable required to enable progress under the current NPPF (2023 edition). The plan would then be caught under the new NPPF requirements which would significantly delay preparation of the plan.
59. The risk of not proceeding with the planned timetable is significant and it is therefore not recommended. Nonetheless, there remains risk associated with progressing as planned when the publication timescales for the new NPPF are unknown, which will need to be monitored throughout the next stages of the plan.
60. Once the Joint Local Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State, the examination timetable is in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate.

## **Conclusion**

61. South and Vale Cabinets are requested to recommend to South and Vale Councils that the Publication Version of the Joint Local Plan, together with supporting technical evidence and papers, be published for a period of six weeks under Regulations 19 and 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, and thereafter submitted to the Secretary of State for examination. Any necessary or proposed amends or corrections to the Joint Local Plan and supporting documents that are required prior to publication and/or submission or during the examination will be agreed by the Head of Policy and Programmes in consultation with the South Cabinet member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes. The examining Inspector(s) will also be invited to recommend any modifications to the Joint Local Plan 2041 that they may consider are required.
62. Approval is also sought on the Joint LDS (August 2024), as referred to in this report.
63. Formal recommendations are set out at the beginning of this report.

## **Background Papers**

See Appendix 7 for proposed list of evidence documents.

# **Appendix 1. Joint Local Plan 2041 Publication Version (October 2024)**

See separate document attached.

# **Appendix 2. Proposed Joint Local Plan Policies Map Publication Version (October 2024)**

Available online at:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/83d01e42542c4ee8ae383747a1c3e57b/>

Dark skies mapping available online at:

<https://luc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e837b7ad4d5448bb89b9e4de5c8adea7>

Renewables Maps and Renewables Mapping Description Table – see separate documents attached.



## **Appendix 3. Joint Local Development Scheme (August 2024)**

See separate document attached.

## Appendix 4. Summary of main changes since Regulation 18

Chapter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant change, updates to reflect current stage reached for the Joint Local Plan</li> </ul>
Chapter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant change</li> </ul>
Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant change, some additions to the plan's objectives to refer to retrofitting, flooding and sewerage</li> </ul>
Chapter 4: Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies CE1 (Sustainable design and construction) and CE2 (Net Zero Carbon Buildings) wording has been strengthened, changing requirements from 'should' to 'must'.</li> <li>• Policy CE3 (Reducing embodied carbon) - following viability assessment, embodied carbon standards have been amended from mandatory to encouragement for Vale of White Horse residential developments and South Oxfordshire specialist older persons housing with care accommodation. Other residential developments of less than 50 homes and non-residential development less than 5000m2 are also encouraged to meet the standards.</li> <li>• Policy CE5 (Renewable energy) amended to reflect recent changes to the NPPF which previously required onshore wind schemes to demonstrate community support in order to gain permission.</li> <li>• Policy CE10 (Pollution sources and receptors) changed to align the policy with the emerging dark skies guidance document following the dark skies consultant's (Darkscape Consulting) review.</li> </ul>
Chapter 5: Spatial Strategy and Settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy SP1 (Spatial strategy) updated to remove reference to the brownfield allocation at Crowmarsh Gifford</li> <li>• Policy SP2 (Settlement hierarchy) changed to remove Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe (one settlement) from the hierarchy and into countryside</li> <li>• All Town policies (SP3-SP9) have been changed to include reference to the Leisure and Green Infrastructure studies where there are specific infrastructure requirements or targets related to each town</li> <li>• Policy SP3 (The strategy for Didcot Garden Town) changed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ reference further related infrastructure schemes (the Milton Heights Active Travel Bridge and the North East Didcot to DTECH LDO Active Travel Bridge)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ remove reference to 'professionally managed homes for private rent' within the principles as this conflicts with the affordable housing policy</li> <li>● Town policies (SP4-SP9) have been changed to include new criteria related to the Strategic Active Travel Network and Mobility Hubs on the advice of Oxfordshire County Council.</li> </ul>
Chapter 6: Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Changes to the housing requirement to reflect changes to affordability adjustment to the standard method (released in March 2024), from 17,050 to 16,530 for South and 14,390 to 14,490 for Vale</li> <li>● Changes to the housing supply tables to reflect updated information for 2024. Trajectory Graphs moved to Appendix 4 of the JLP.</li> <li>● Affordable housing percentage set at 50% in South Oxfordshire and 40% in Vale following viability assessment, which is also reflected in the site allocations in Chapter 8.</li> <li>● Changes to the policy setting out the need for, and how we address the need for, older people's accommodation, including older person's housing with care accommodation. Setting the affordable housing contribution for older person's housing with care to 30% for both councils.</li> <li>● New accessibility standards for dwellings (category M4(2) and M4(3)), for addressing accessibility for with reduced mobility</li> <li>● Confirmation of all homes being built to nationally described space standards</li> <li>● New housing mix (different sizes of homes by number of bedrooms)</li> <li>● New affordable housing tenure mix</li> <li>● A requirement for 5% of all homes on sites of 200 or more homes to be delivered as self or custom build plots</li> <li>● Changes to the cascade approach to how affordable self or custom build plots are released to the open market</li> <li>● Changes to the policy setting out the need for, and how we address the need for, Gypsy and Travellers</li> <li>● Changes to the site size threshold for rural exception sites, from 5% of settlement size / 1ha to a judgement based approach (of a size and scale commensurate with the existing settlement)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of a 20% affordable housing requirement for Build to Rent proposals.</li> </ul>
Chapter 7: Jobs and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy JT1 (Meeting employment needs) updated to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ separate out the sources of supply against the requirement in sequence which means that there are updates to the site reference numbers in the tables and on the Policies Map</li> <li>○ make sure all sources of employment supply that previously were not mentioned are now included, such as the two Local Development Orders and sites that have not yet delivered on Enterprise Zones</li> <li>○ include some re-introduced previous allocations at the Former ESSO Research Centre and Monks Farm to make sure all sources of employment supply are included</li> <li>○ recalculate site sizes and total supply of employment, following a thorough check of all sites remaining supply on each site listed in policy JT1, with the biggest change being Milton Park which has just under half of its original Enterprise Zone sites remaining for re-development</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Policy JT3 (Affordable workspace) changed to reference the Stage 2 Employment Land Needs Assessment evidence of need for affordable workspaces, and a new reference to a future strategy to help guide implementation of the policy</li> <li>• Policies JT6 (Supporting sustainable tourism and the visitor economy) and JT7 (Overnight visitor accommodation) amended to support proposals outside existing settlements which are of a scale, type and appearance appropriate to the locality, and which meet certain site-specific criteria. In JT6, such proposals could include farm diversification or recreational equine development.</li> </ul>
Chapter 8: Site Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No boundary changes to proposed residential allocations and no additional residential allocations made</li> <li>• Additional policy wording for Vauxhall Barracks, Gateway and Rich's Sidings allocations (all in Didcot), to ensure policy requirements are clear for these sites</li> <li>• Minor changes to wording of policies to address representations, including those from the Environment Agency and Oxfordshire County Council, and improve effectiveness</li> <li>• Introductory text to the two Garden Villages added for context</li> <li>• Additions and alterations made to residential allocations to address the following points, where relevant:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Accommodation needs for care for older people and the need for 5% of homes to be designed to support older people's needs</li> <li>○ Employment land requirements</li> <li>○ Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision</li> <li>○ Specific deliverables for biodiversity net gain, and walking and cycling routes</li> <li>○ Infrastructure requirements to ensure consistence with latest evidence and the IDP</li> <li>● Strategic Employment: clarification on the masterplan requirements for Harwell and Culham</li> <li>● The proposal to allocate the former council office site at Crowmarsh Gifford has not been carried forward into the draft submission version of the plan. There is no identified need to allocate this site for residential or employment uses of any type. One of the landowner's promoted uses would see a continuation of the established employment use of the site and therefore does not require an allocation to be made at this time. A future allocation could be considered through a future Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan.</li> </ul>
Chapter 9: Town Centres and Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policy TCR1 (Centre hierarchy) changed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Merge the 'Principal Town Centre' tier with the 'Town Centre' tier because the town centre policy is the same for both tiers</li> <li>○ remove Crowmarsh Gifford from the list of village/local centres, as there is no longer any retail provision here</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Policy TCR3 (Retail floorspace provision (convenience and comparison goods)) updated to confirm that sites should continue to be identified in Henley-on-Thames and Thame, through the review of the Henley-Harpsden and Thame Neighbourhood Development Plans respectively, to accommodate a single format food store with at least 1,500sqm net sales floorspace</li> <li>● Policy TCR4 (Retail and service provision in villages and local centres) updated to provide clarity on when new farm shops will be supported, and the use of planning conditions to control the types of produce sold and/or the amount of net floor area dedicated to the sale of produce grown or made on the farm.</li> </ul>
Chapter 10: Well-designed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policy DE1 (High quality design) updated with:</li> </ul>

<p>Places for our Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ minor changes to wording to address representations received from the County Council (on the movement and connectivity section) and the Ministry of Defence (in terms of design impacts on defence sites)</li> <li>○ stronger references to Green Infrastructure following recommendations from the Green Infrastructure study.</li> <li>● Policy DE2 (Local character and identity) updated to reference the North Wessex Downs Colour Guide following a recommendation to do so by North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership in their representation.</li> <li>● Policies DE1 (High quality design) and DE2 (Local character and identity) changed to ensure consistency in wording with other plan policies and make relevant cross references where required.</li> </ul>
<p>Chapter 11: Healthy Places</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policy HP2 (Community facilities and services) updated with the addition of Asset of Community Value to the protection of community facilities policy</li> <li>● Policies HP4 (Existing open space, sport and recreation facilities) and HP5 (New facilities for sport, physical activity and recreation) changed to update the requirement for development involving open space, sport, and recreation facilities to consider their long-term management, ownership, and stewardship</li> <li>● Policy H6 (Green infrastructure on new developments) updated to ensure that development contributes to and protects Green Infrastructure in accordance with the latest evidence</li> <li>● Policy HP7 (Open space on new developments) updated to include the 3 hectares per 1,000 population standard recommended in the Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces Study</li> <li>● Policies HP7 (Open space on new developments), HP8 (Provision for children’s play and spaces for young people) and HP9 (Provision for children’s play and spaces for young people) updated to reference the quantity standards from the evidence study.</li> </ul>
<p>Chapter 12: Nature Recovery, Heritage and Landscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policy NH1 (Biodiversity designations) changed to include explicit mention of lowland fens being an irreplaceable habitat to be protected with new evidence commissioned to establish the extent of lowland fens’ hydrological catchments</li> <li>● Policy NH2 (Nature recovery) updated to provide a specific requirement figure of 20% for biodiversity net gain</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy NH5 (District-valued landscapes) amended to include the nine new valued landscapes</li> <li>• Policy NH7 (Tranquillity) amended to remove designated tranquil areas, and instead promote consideration of tranquillity across the districts.</li> </ul>
Chapter 13: Infrastructure, Transport, Connectivity and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy INF3 (Transport infrastructure and safeguarding) the eastern Wantage and Grove Railway Station safeguarding location has been re-introduced and revised to allow for a station and access to the north and south of the railway line.</li> <li>• Policy IN3 (Transport infrastructure and safeguarding) changed to include additional safeguarding schemes specifically for walking and cycling from Oxfordshire County Councils Strategic Active Travel Network project.</li> </ul>
Monitoring Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New monitoring framework added</li> </ul>
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New appendices added</li> </ul>
Policies Map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some minor amendments and new layers to reflect new / updated evidence and changes since Regulation 18</li> </ul>

# **Appendix 5. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (September 2024)**

See separate document attached.



# **Appendix 6. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Stage 1 Screening Report**

See separate document attached.

# **Appendix 7. Proposed list of supporting evidence documents to be published for Regulation 19**

## Publication Documents

Joint Local Plan 2041 (Publication Version)

Emerging Policies Map (Publication Version)

Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (September 2024)

Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 Screening Report)

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

## Evidence Documents

Assessment of Habitats and Species Trends

Assessment of sites' Biodiversity Net Gain potential

Dark Skies / Light Impact Assessment Methodology Report

Lighting Design Guide

Employment Land Needs Assessment

Equalities Impact Assessment

Existing Transport Conditions Report

Green Belt Review

Green Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Study

Health Impact Assessment

Heritage Impact Assessment

Hotel and Other Overnight Accommodation Study

Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

Joint Housing Needs Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (South and Vale)

Lowland Fen Hydrological Catchment Mapping

Net Zero Carbon Study

Exceptional Circumstances Report to support Policy CE2

Playing Pitch Strategy (South and Vale)

Renewables Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Level 1

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Level 2

Study of Active Travel for Allocations  
Sustainable Transport Study (Decide and Provide)  
Town Centres and Retail Study  
Tranquillity Assessment  
Transport Assessment (Modelling)  
Valued Landscape Assessment  
Viability Assessment  
Water Cycle Study – Scoping Report

Procedural and Consultation Documents

Statement of Availability and Representations Procedure  
Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Co-operate  
Preferred Options Consultation Statement  
Preferred Options Representations  
Issues Consultation Results and Representations

# **Appendix 8. Proposed list of Topic Papers**

Climate Change Topic Paper

Employment Needs Topic Paper

Housing Requirement and Affordable Housing Topic Paper

Justification for higher Biodiversity Net Gain Topic Paper

Residential Focused Site Allocations Topic Paper

Settlement Assessment and Hierarchy Topic Paper

Site Selection (incorporating Flood Risk Sequential Test) Topic Paper

Spatial Strategy Topic Paper

Town Centres and Retail Topic Paper

Transport Safeguarding Topic Paper

Water Efficiency Topic Paper