

# **Media Release from South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse District Councils**

## **Next steps for Local Plans**

Councillors in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse will this week review an update to the timetable for the Joint Local Plan and its plans for development in the area.

Also on the agenda for discussion are new government requirements that will mean the councils will need to start work on the next local plan before the independent examination on the last one is finished.

A local plan is a document councils are required to prepare to provide plans and policies for all types of development, including new housing and employment developments in the area as well as identifying the infrastructure needed to support them.

The councils' Joint Local Plan 2041 is currently being examined by government-appointed inspectors. The plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in December 2024. The first stage of inspector-led hearing sessions took place in June 2025, with the second stage of hearing sessions programmed to take place on 7 to 9 July 2026, followed by further hearings in the autumn.

The examination of the Joint Local Plan encountered a temporary setback in September 2025, following a letter from the inspectors outlining their initial findings from the first hearing sessions held in June 2025. Encouragingly, progress is now firmly back on track, supported by recent national changes to the local plan examination process.

New government regulations mean that at the same time as working towards adopting the first Joint Local Plan between the two district councils, they are required to start preparing their next plan or plans for the area, which would run to 2045. This is known as 'twin-tracking'.

At Cabinet and Council meetings in June, Councillors will consider if the councils would benefit from working together again on a joint plan – or to prepare separate plans. They will also consider the timetable for the new local plan.

This needs to be in line with the government's requirements for preparing, examining and adopting plans in 30 months, which the councils must start by 31 October 2026.

**Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson, South Oxfordshire District Council Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, said:** "Our forthcoming first Joint Local Plan delivers on our vision and priorities as well as providing help to our neighbouring districts. It is good

to see that it is now progressing once again through the examination process - and we look forward to working with the local plan inspectors to take this forward in July.

“We also have to prepare ourselves for the next local plan. Nearly 40 other councils around the country preparing their last plan under the previous arrangements are in the same position as us – so we are by no means unique in ‘twin-tracking’ two plans simultaneously. It will certainly be a challenge – but I have every confidence we can rise to the occasion, based on our previous performance.”

**Cllr Andy Foulsham, Vale of White Horse District Council Cabinet Member for Policy and Programmes, said:** “The councils have worked tirelessly over four years to reach this stage. This is a good local plan – it’s robust, innovative, forward-thinking and based on strong community engagement. We welcome the opportunity for our joint plan to benefit from a thorough public examination over this year.

“We will have our work cut out for us in developing a second plan – but on the strength of our previous work on the first Joint Local Plan, we will rise to the occasion and bring the same dedication and determination to see it through, handing over the baton to the new authority when the times comes.”

With Local Government Reorganisation, a new unitary authority would look to adopt the second local plan/plans, but the existing councils must start the process.

Once the decision has been made by the councils on how best to proceed, the new Joint Local Plan (or local plans) will go out for the first stage of public consultation in September 2026 asking what the plan should cover.

For more information on the first Joint Local Plan (JLP1) visit [www.southandvale.gov.uk/joint-local-plan-2041-examination](http://www.southandvale.gov.uk/joint-local-plan-2041-examination)

The reports to Cabinets are available below:

- [South Cabinet report](#)
- [Vale Cabinet report](#)

### **Joint Local Plan background information**

The first Joint Local Plan entered the examination hearing phase in June 2025. In September 2025, inspectors examining the district councils’ plan said it had failed on the “Duty to Co-operate”, suggesting the councils might need to withdraw the plan from the examination process as a result.

A [meeting took place in February](#) 2026 with inspectors to discuss the way forward for the examination in light of government announcements intending to remove the Duty to Co-operate. The Joint Local Plan will now progress through the remaining examination stages, starting with more hearings in July.