



Full Council	Tuesday, 21 December 2021	Matter for Decision
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Report Title: **South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Common Ground (Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough)**

Report Author(s): **Jamie Carr (Planning Policy Manager)**

Purpose of Report:	To request Member approval of the Statement of Common Ground.
Report Summary:	<p>During Local Plan production, all plan-making authorities are required to produce, maintain and keep up-to-date statements of common ground. A statement of common ground is a factual statement that sets out agreement on issues with neighbouring authorities and other relevant organisations. Local authorities can have a number of statements of common ground focusing on different topics with different organisations.</p> <p>This statement of common ground focuses on three strategic cross boundary issues and associated evidence base (strategic transport, infrastructure delivery and whole plan viability), as well as seeking to align local plan timescales. This statement is directly relevant for the plan making authorities of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough district/boroughs, but has been produced with the support of Leicestershire County Council (as the local highways authority) and Hinckley and Bosworth Council (as an adjacent neighbour to Blaby District).</p> <p>This statement sets out that the most appropriate way of dealing with the strategic cross boundary issues mentioned would be to produce a joint evidence base for Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough district/boroughs. This statement also sets out that the joint evidence base could bring with it a number of advantages.</p> <p>Further, the statement suggests that local plan production timetables for the authorities of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough should be aligned as far as possible.</p>
Recommendation(s):	That the South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Common Ground set out at Appendix A be approved.
Senior Leadership, Head of Service, Manager, Officer and Other Contact(s):	<p>Anne Court (Chief Executive) anne.court1@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>Adrian Thorpe (Head of Built Environment) (0116) 257 2645 adrian.thorpe@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>Jamie Carr (Planning Policy Manager) (0116) 257 2652 jamie.carr@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p>
Corporate Objectives:	Building, Protecting and Empowering Communities (CO1)

	Growing the Borough Economically (CO2) Providing Excellent Services (CO3)
Vision and Values:	"A Stronger Borough Together" (Vision) Accountability (V1) Respect (V2) Teamwork (V3) Innovation (V4) Customer Focus (V5)
Report Implications:-	
Legal:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Financial:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Corporate Risk Management:	Political Dynamics (CR3) Reputation Damage (CR4) Regulatory Governance (CR6) Economy / Regeneration (CR9)
Equalities and Equalities Assessment (EA):	There are no implications arising from this report. EA not applicable
Human Rights:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Health and Safety:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Statutory Officers' Comments:-	
Head of Paid Service:	The report is satisfactory.
Chief Finance Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Monitoring Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees:	None.
Background Papers:	None.
Appendices:	1. Appendix 1 – South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Common Ground

1. Introduction

- 1.1 During Local Plan production, all plan-making authorities are required to produce, maintain and keep up-to-date statements of common ground.
- 1.2 A statement of common ground is a factual statement that sets out agreement on issues, including cross boundary strategic issues, with neighbouring authorities and other relevant organisations. Local authorities can have a number of statements of common ground focusing on different topics with different organisations. The Council produced a number of statements of common ground during the preparation of the current adopted Local Plan.
- 1.3 This statement of common ground focuses on three identified strategic cross boundary

issues and associated evidence base (namely strategic transport, infrastructure delivery and whole plan viability), as well as alignment of local plan timescales. The statement is directly relevant for the plan making authorities of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby District and Harborough District, but has been produced with the support of Leicestershire County Council (as the local highways authority), and Hinckley and Bosworth Council (as an adjacent neighbour to Blaby District).

- 1.4 The statement sets out that the most appropriate way of dealing with the strategic cross boundary issues mentioned, would be to produce joint evidence base for Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough district/boroughs. The statement also sets out that the joint evidence base could bring with it a number of advantages.
- 1.5 Further, the statement suggests that local plan production timetables for the authorities of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby and Harborough should be aligned as far as possible.
- 1.6 In relation to the alignment of local plan timescales, it is worth noting that this is in response to the Government requirement that all local authorities must have an up to date Local Plan in place by December 2023; as set out in the 19th January 2021 Written Ministerial Statement and the more recent Chief Planners Planning Newsletter (November 2021).
- 1.7 As Members will be aware, the Council has already begun its new Local Plan journey and is seeking to have a new Local Plan in place by the end of 2023.
- 1.8 Updates or further statements of common ground with Blaby District and Harborough District will be prepared and maintained in light of future publication of evidence.

2. Discussion

Geography

- 2.1 Although, all local authorities within Leicester and Leicestershire are linked and are situated within a shared housing market area (the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area) and a shared functional economic market area (the Leicester and Leicestershire Functional Economic Area); for the purpose of this statement of common ground, only the administrative areas of Blaby District, Harborough District and the Borough of Oadby and Wigston are relevant.
- 2.2 This South Leicestershire geographical area is important now and for the future, as it has an opportunity to play a pivotal role in strategic infrastructure provision to enable a shift towards delivering more future planned growth on strategic sites with accompanying local infrastructure. This is consistent with the approach set out in the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan.
- 2.3 The administrative areas plan set out in Appendix A of this statement of common ground illustrates the relevant geographical area and local authority boundaries.

Key matters being dealt with in the Statement

- 2.4 There are a number of key strategic issues that are identified within this statement of common ground. These issues include; Transport connectivity; Other Infrastructure Requirements; and, Development Pressures and Opportunities. Further information in relation to these can be found at paragraphs 6.1 to 10.1 (inclusive) of the statement of common ground in Appendix A to this report.
- 2.5 In short, the above issues will be assessed and dealt with through the production of three

pieces of key evidence base work – Strategic Transport Assessment; Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and Whole Plan Viability.

- 2.6 It is envisaged that these three pieces of joint evidence base will be undertaken during the Autumn / Winter period of 2022 – 2023 when the authorities involved have a good indication of the likely scale and locations for growth which will emerge from work currently taking place with the whole of Leicester and Leicestershire.
- 2.7 The Strategic Transport Assessment will assess, identify and set out whether or not the levels of growth proposed for each local authority can be accommodated on the current network, from a transport and highway perspective. The assessment will also recommend likely interventions needed to accommodate proposed growth if the current network cannot accommodate it.
- 2.8 The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will assess and set out the required infrastructure (additional to highway and transport) likely to be needed to allow the levels of proposed growth to come forward. Required infrastructure could range from, new sports pitches and open-spaces, to GP surgeries, to new Schools, to new retail centres.
- 2.9 The Whole Plan Viability Assessment will take account of all of the growth proposed, all of the interventions that are required to bring it forward, all of the required infrastructure, as well as relevant policy requirements (for example affordable housing) and assess whether it is viable to accommodate everything. To note – the Council's current adopted Local Plan was subject to both an affordable housing assessment and a whole plan viability assessment.
- 2.10 Further information in relation to the three pieces of joint evidence base can be found at paragraphs 11.1 to 11.9 (inclusive) of the statement of common ground in Appendix A to this report.
- 2.11 It should be noted that this statement of common ground will not deal with the re-distribution of Leicester City's unmet housing and employment need. This issue will be dealt with in a wider Leicester and Leicestershire statement of common ground in the future.

Advantages to undertaking the evidence jointly

- 2.12 There are a number of advantages to local authorities undertaking Local Plan evidence base jointly, and include;
 - Meeting the Duty to Cooperate – joint working demonstrates fully that emerging Local Plans are based on effective and on-going cooperation and as far as possible are based on agreement. This helps the Council to demonstrate to the Planning Inspectorate that it has fulfilled its legal duty. The more areas of agreement, the greater chance the Council will have in having its new Local Plan found sound by the Planning Inspectorate.
 - No surprises – on-going joint and collaborative working enables each of the local authorities to share information and plans in relation to potential development and growth occurring within each area. It also ensures that appropriate mitigation can be assessed and proposed, irrespective of the local authority area where the growth is proposed or the impact is predicted.
 - Money saving – it is envisaged that joint working between the three local authorities will bring about cost savings due to economies of scale. It is hoped that the preparation of a single piece of evidence base for three local authority areas, would be more cost effective than producing three pieces of the same evidence base

individually.

- Less risk – it is envisaged that working jointly will help negate the risk of developers challenging local authorities due to issues arising elsewhere. Working jointly will mean a collaborative and consistent approach is used throughout.
- No abrupt stop – working jointly with the three local authorities with which the Borough shares a boundary, allows for true cross boundary working, for example, new walking and cycling or highway infrastructure would not just abruptly stop at one boundary edge, it would flow seamlessly across if it was needed to. It also allows for cross boundary impacts of development and growth to be assessed and mitigated appropriately. This is particularly relevant for a small Borough such as Oadby and Wigston.

Aligning Local Plan timescales

- 2.13 In addition to the three key areas of joint evidence base, this statement of common ground sets out that the three local authorities will attempt to align their Local Plan production timetables.
- 2.14 Earlier this year, the Government in its 19th January 2021 Written Ministerial Statement, set out that every local authority must have an up-to-date Local Plan in place by the end of 2023. In addition, in a more recent statement, this requirement has been reiterated. The Chief Planner Planning Newsletter, sets out that *'it is critical that work should continue to advance Local Plans through to adoption by the end of 2023 to help ensure that the economy can rebound strongly from the COVID-19 pandemic. Completing Local Plans will help to ensure that we can build back better and continue to deliver the homes that are needed across England'*.
- 2.15 With the above in mind, it is considered that attempting to align the three local authorities Local Plans is an opportunity that should not be passed up.
- 2.16 The Council has already commenced its new Local Plan production and has undertaken two public consultations – Call for Sites and Issues and Options consultation. The decision to begin the new Local Plan process was taken due to the Government announcement (set out above) and the increase to Leicester City's unmet housing and employment need.
- 2.17 The Council's most up-to-date Local Development Scheme sets out the new Local Plan timetable.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Comment Ground sets out that the three local authority areas of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby District and Harborough District will work together on three vital pieces of Local Plan evidence base – Strategic Transport Assessment; Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and, Whole Plan Viability.
- 3.2 All three pieces of evidence mentioned above are required to underpin every local authorities Local Plan, so the Council would need to undertake them irrespective of whether they are produced jointly with Blaby District and Harborough District, or not. However, as demonstrated above, there are a number of advantages to producing it jointly.
- 3.3 In addition to undertaking the three key pieces of evidence jointly, it is considered that there is currently a great opportunity to align the Local Plan timescales of the three local authorities, not only because of the requirement to have up-to-date Local Plans in place by the end of 2023 (therefore all local authorities should be striving for this), but also that the

key issues identified are best dealt with jointly and consistently.