

South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Comment Ground (November 2021)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared jointly by Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council hereafter referred to as “the authorities”.
- 1.2. Given their shared geographical boundary with Blaby District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) are an additional signatory to this SoCG. HBBC is at a more advanced stage in evidence development and plan making than that the authorities. This is set out in more detail in section 13 below.
- 1.3. Leicestershire County Council is the upper tier authority with statutory responsibilities for transportation, education, social care, flooding, minerals & waste planning and public health, and as such is an additional signatory.
- 1.4. This statement has been prepared for the purposes of the emerging Local Plans that each of the authorities have commenced or are due to commence. It focuses on some of the key shared issues that each of the authorities will need to address in developing their Local Plans, the opportunities for understanding and potentially overcoming those issues and finally what this means for each of those authorities in the context of the Government requirement to have an up to date Local Plan in place by December 2023, as set out in the 19th January 2021 Written Ministerial Statement.
- 1.5. Further SoCG will be prepared and maintained in light of future publication of evidence and local plan timetabling for each authority area. Section 15 sets out the ‘next steps’ for the authorities following completion of key evidence.

Duty to Cooperate

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Paragraph 27 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (most recently updated July 2021) explains that local planning authorities have a requirement to produce and maintain one or more SoCG to document the identified cross-boundary matters and progress in cooperating to address these.

3. Background

- 3.1. As part of the Leicester and Leicestershire sub region the authorities have a long history of working closely and effectively together.
- 3.2. The Leicester and Leicestershire authorities have continuously engaged with each other on strategic matters and throughout the preparation of Local Plans across the area. This is most clearly evidenced through:
 - The establishment of the Leicester & Leicestershire Members Advisory Group

- The joint preparation of evidence, including the Housing & Economic Development Needs Assessment (2017)
 - The adoption of a non-statutory Strategic Growth Plan 2018 which includes ‘notional’ housing figures.
 - The agreement of Joint Position Statements in 2017, 2018 and 2020
- 3.3. More recently this is demonstrated in the Leicester & Leicestershire Authorities - Statement of Common Ground relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs (June 2021) (L&L SoCG) which sets out a work programme for the apportionment of Leicester City’s unmet need.

4. Role of this SoCG

- 4.1. This SoCG is prepared in the context of identified key cross boundary issues that are specific to this group of authorities due to their geography, shared boundaries and known strategic constraints.
- 4.2. This SoCG sets out some of the key cross-boundary matters being addressed through cooperation by the authorities. Specifically, it highlights the cross boundary strategic planning matters in the authorities’ administrative areas that need to be addressed through collaborative evidence. By doing this it aims to demonstrate that the authorities’ emerging local plans are based on effective and ongoing cooperation and that the individual strategies are as far as possible based on agreement. The authorities will work together to achieve this through the alignment of local plan and evidence production timetables as much as possible.

5. Strategic Geography

- 5.1. As detailed in the L&L SoCG, all authorities are within a shared housing market area, the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area (HMA), and a shared functional economic market area, the Leicester and Leicestershire Functional Economic Area (FEMA). However, for the purpose of this SoCG, only the administrative areas of Blaby District, Harborough District and the Borough of Oadby and Wigston is relevant.
- 5.2. This geographical area is important to the whole of the L&L HMA, and will be even more so in 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.
- 5.3. The administrative areas plan set out in Appendix A show that all the authority areas also share a boundary. There is a need to work cooperatively in an effective way to address key strategic matters pertaining to these areas.

Key Matters on which the parties agree

6. Apportionment of Leicester’s Unmet Need to 2036

- 6.1. The Leicester & Leicestershire Authorities - Statement of Common Ground relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs (June 2021), signed by all parties within the Leicester

and Leicestershire Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Area (FEMA), sets out the current position and details the work currently underway that will inform the apportionment. This will not be repeated in this statement.

7. Strategic Matters

- 7.1. With a shared strategic geography, the following key cross boundary issues have been identified: transport connectivity; other infrastructure requirements; and development pressures and opportunities. This SoCG is not intended to identify all common issues but focus on those listed above where a shared approach is considered to be the most effective in finding solutions to expedite plan making for each authority.

8. Transport Connectivity

- 8.1. Key transport networks within the geographic area are interconnected. These include routes on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and Local Road Network (LRN) which run through the authority areas, most notably the M1, M69, A47, A6, A5199 and the A426. Successive transport evidence has identified existing constraints on each of these routes that result from traffic movements covering a large area. Specifically, this includes capacity issues on the key north-south arterial routes in and out of Leicester City, and the limitations of existing east-west highway infrastructure.
- 8.2. Larger scale highway mitigation secured through current plans is enabling growth to come forward, for example Lutterworth East on the A426 and Lubbethorpe for the M1, albeit the mitigation is primarily to deal with site-specific impacts arising from the respective developments as opposed to dealing with wider, cumulative impacts of growth.
- 8.3. However, it is expected that, in the absence of mitigation, further strategic growth within the authorities' areas would have severe additional individual, cumulative and (in many cases) cross-boundary impacts on already congested parts of the highway network and that these impacts could require strategic transport solutions to address. Given the complexity and integrated nature of the transport network within the authorities' areas, a consistent and joint transport evidence base will provide a more robust basis on which to plan.

9. Other Infrastructure Requirements

- 9.1. New development can put pressure on existing communities, services and facilities if there is a lack of accompanying infrastructure, such as open space, education provision and health facilities. As such, it is necessary to work with a range of service providers to identify all necessary infrastructure to make strategic growth sustainable and deliverable. Historically this has been challenging on an individual local planning authority basis. Often service providers have resourcing issues which can hinder them from engaging effectively in the process in a timely manner. They often operate on a larger scale than the local authority level and again this can impact their ability to respond effectively. By the authorities working together, it is anticipated that the resourcing burden on service providers will be reduced.

10. Development Pressures and Opportunities

10.1. Each authority is considering strategic growth opportunities, many of which are close to administrative boundaries and all of which will be served by the same roads and other transport facilities (e.g. bus and rail services) and are therefore likely to interact in transport and other infrastructure terms. Correspondingly, a common approach to transport assessment and the identification of other infrastructure is required to understand the interrelationships between the potential growth options and identify appropriate cumulative mitigation. Cross boundary working is particularly beneficial in this respect.

11. Evidence Production

11.1. As stated above there is a history of joint working for evidence production with clear benefits being efficiencies for each partner but also strength in robustness of evidence. To address the issues detailed above, the authorities will work together to produce the following key pieces of evidence:

- **Strategic Transport Assessment**

11.2. The housing and employment targets for each of the authorities will be subjected to a joint strategic transport assessment that will cover the authority areas as identified within Appendix A. This will be produced in collaboration with Leicestershire County Council Highways, National Highways, Leicester City Council and other relevant highway authorities.

11.3. The STA will identify the implications of the growth options in transport terms including pinch points on the existing network and will test scenarios of mitigation to understand whether growth can come forward.

11.4. This work will follow the sub regional Strategic Transport Assessment currently in production for the administrative areas of the eight local planning authorities and two transport authorities within Leicestershire.

- **Infrastructure Delivery Plan**

11.5. Growth allocated within a Local Plan must be supported by identified strategic infrastructure. This includes, but is not limited to, highways and transport, health, and education, and also other infrastructure such as utilities and libraries.

11.6. The authorities will look to jointly commission consultants to produce an infrastructure delivery plan which will identify the strategic infrastructure required to deliver growth in each of the emerging local plans.

11.7. The authorities will consider effective ways in which to engage with relevant infrastructure providers, including through an infrastructure board. This could bring benefits to those organisations that operate on a more strategic basis than local authority area.

- **Viability**

11.8. The outputs of the STA and IDP will be subjected to a whole plan viability appraisal. Although each of the authorities will need to consider their own specific proposed provisions in their draft local plans, the mitigation measures will be tested together.

- **Other opportunities**

11.9. If an opportunity for joint working arises that is not set out within this SoCG the authorities are not bound by the list within this SoCG and will look to take advantage of joint evidence production where possible.

12. Local Plan Timescales

12.1. Each authority is required to prepare a Local Development Scheme (LDS) which sets out a timetable for preparing its Local Plan. Progress is dependent upon the outcome of the sub regional evidence base, as set out above, before the more substantive Local Plan evidence base can commence. As set out in the Leicester & Leicestershire Authorities - SoCG relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs (June 2021) the sub regional evidence is due for completion Winter 2021/2022. Evidence relating to transport impact, infrastructure requirements and whole plan viability cannot be undertaken until this sub regional work is complete. The authorities will ensure that they are in a position to expedite the joint evidence on completion of the sub regional work.

12.2. Each authority will maintain their own local plan work programmes, but will incorporate the below milestones:

- Strategic Transport Assessment - Autumn / Winter 2022
- Whole Plan Viability – Autumn / Winter 2022
- Infrastructure Development Plan – Autumn / Winter 2022

12.3. The authorities are clear that the alignment of local plan production does not extend to the production of a joint local plan but will explore opportunities to align local plan work programmes where possible on the back of the above evidence timetable. Each authority will continue in the production of a Local Plan for their own administrative area.

13. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

13.1. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) shares an administrative boundary with BDC and geographically occupies the south west of Leicestershire and as such has a strong relationship with the authorities on strategic matters. HBBC are at a more advanced stage in evidence development and plan making than that the authorities. This means that some pieces of work will be undertaken only by the three authorities and HBBC's existing evidence base will be used to supplement this work to present a complete picture. Where appropriate, HBBC evidence base will be updated, for example, to align time periods. The authorities and HBBC will maintain an ongoing and effective relationship on cross

boundary strategic issues and will ensure the evidence the authorities commission as listed above will reflect evidence produced by HBBC to inform their Local Plan.

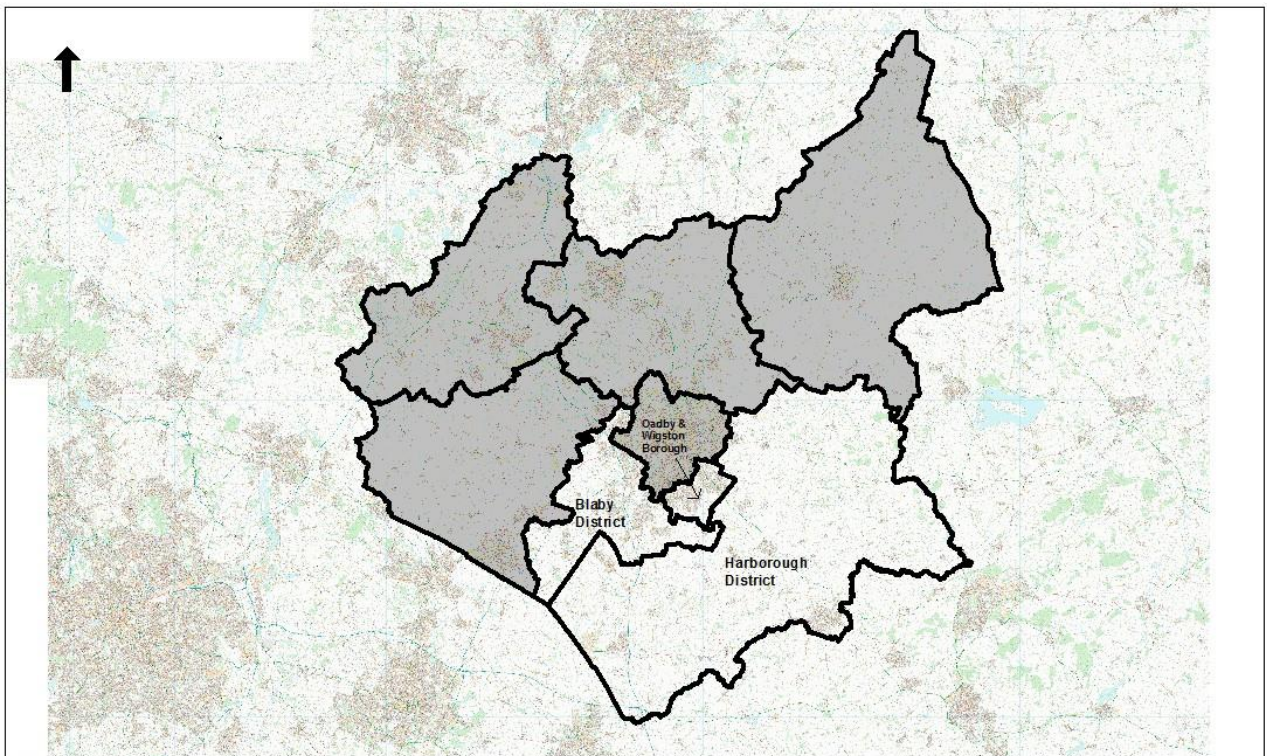
14. Updating this SoCG

- 14.1. The authorities acknowledge the Government intend to reform the planning system and have consulted on a White Paper - Planning for the Future.
- 14.2. There is no timetable for the reforms and the proposals could change following consultations. Against this back-drop the Government is encouraging authorities to get up to-date Local Plans in place.
- 14.3. This SoCG includes an agreed programme of work to jointly undertake key evidence to inform each authority's local plan production. The authorities agree the Duty to Cooperate is an ongoing process and this SoCG will be kept up to date or superseded by a new SoCG to reflect the latest position. This process will be managed through ongoing joint work between the authorities.

15. Next Steps

- 15.1. This SoCG focuses on some of the key shared issues that each of the authorities will need to address in developing their Local Plans and a programme of joint working on important evidence. On completion of the joint evidence, the authorities will continue to work together and will:
 - analyse the outcomes of the jointly produced evidence as listed in section 11 above;
 - jointly produce further SoCG as necessary.

APPENDIX A – Geographical extent of three authority areas



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Map Ref: SK5509

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