



CABINET – 14 DECEMBER 2021

**SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN MAKING STATEMENT OF
COMMON GROUND (NOVEMBER 2021)**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) which has been prepared by three district councils - Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council - with input from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and the County Council.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that:
 - a) The Cabinet agrees to the County Council becoming a signatory to the South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Common Ground (November 2021);
 - b) The approach by the district councils concerned in relation to the gathering of evidence and in seeking to align activity in the development of their Local Plans via the Statement of Common Ground be welcomed;
 - c) That the Chief Executive be authorised to agree the County Council's response to consultations on Statements of Common Ground and to the County Council becoming a signatory to Statement of Common Ground documents with Leicestershire district councils, Leicester City Council and other neighbouring authorities except where these are considered to be of strategic importance to or have significant policy implications for the Authority, in which case the matter will be referred to the Cabinet.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. The Statement of Common Ground is focused on the preparation of joint evidence for three pieces of key evidence required for the next round of plan making in three district areas. Undertaking the preparation of evidence in this way should significantly assist in understanding the evidence across a 'larger than single district' geographical area and the resultant mitigation strategies which arise to support the delivery of key infrastructure. It is in the best interests

of the County Council as a key infrastructure provider for communities in Leicestershire to support this proposed joint approach to be taken by three district councils in the south of the County (Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council).

4. The Statement of Common Ground is largely a statement of fact and intent and is likely to evolve in the future as work on the joint evidence is undertaken. It will help to demonstrate Duty to Co-operate on these matters by the County Council and the three district councils.
5. The 2018 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local planning authorities to produce SoCGs to demonstrate agreement on cross-boundary strategic issues. Not all of these will require consideration by members.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. The SoCG will be considered by Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and the County Council through their respective governance processes. It is anticipated that this will be undertaken by the end of January 2022.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. The non-statutory Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) for Leicester and Leicestershire which sets out a vision for growth to 2050 was agreed by all partner authorities, including the County Council, in 2018. This sets out the longer-term framework for planned growth to be delivered through future Local Plans.
8. In June 2021 the Cabinet noted the action taken by the Chief Executive to agree for the County Council to become a signatory to the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground Relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs (March 2021), and on 19 November 2021 the Cabinet agreed that the Council would be a signatory to the Statement of Common Ground relating to Strategic Warehousing and Logistics needs (September 2021).

Resource Implications

9. There are no resource implications for the Council arising from the recommendations in this report.
10. The Director of Law and Governance has been consulted on the contents of this report and her comments (Legal and Planning) have been included.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. A copy of this report will be circulated to all Members.

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PART B

Background

12. The opportunity to benefit from economies of scale and align evidence collection and analysis for Local Plan preparation in the south of the County has arisen. This is due to the commonality of strategic issues in this part of the County and the opportunity to explore aligning local plan production programmes where possible. The benefits include resource savings through efficiencies and the opportunity for spatial plan making to be strengthened. This has been discussed by officers at a senior level and has been encouraged and supported by the Joint Strategic Planning Manager for Leicester and Leicestershire. It should enable a 'seamless' understanding of evidence to be gained across three district areas, a particular benefit given the geographical nature, character and connectivity of many parts of the three districts.
13. Given the role of the County Council as a key infrastructure provider with statutory responsibilities for transportation, education, adult social care, flooding, minerals and waste planning and public health, the County Council is invited to be a signatory.
14. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough also forms part of the south of the County and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council wishes to input and link its Local Plan evidence to the joint evidence, as such Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council are also an additional signatory to this SoCG.
15. A Statement of Common Ground provides a commonly understood basis for the partner authorities' work on planning matters including Local Plans and provision of infrastructure. Under the 2018 NPPF all local planning authorities have a requirement to produce and maintain an SoCG to highlight agreement on cross-boundary strategic issues with neighbouring authorities and other relevant organisations. SoCGs are increasingly being produced to cover a range of issues and many are simply statements of fact and as such will not require consideration by members.

Overview of Content of Statement of Common Ground

16. The SoCG has been prepared jointly by Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council with input from the County Council and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.
17. The SoCG sets out some of the key cross-boundary strategic planning matters being addressed through cooperation by the authorities through collaborative evidence. By doing so 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 evidence production timetables as much as possible.

18. With a shared strategic geography, the following key cross boundary issues have been identified: transport connectivity; other infrastructure requirements and development pressures and opportunities. The 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.
19. The SoCG specifically covers three pieces of evidence for the future Local Plans for the Blaby, Harborough and Oadby and Wigston districts which the three councils propose to prepare jointly:
- Strategic Transport Assessment (Autumn/Winter 2022);
 - Whole Plan Viability (Autumn/Winter 2022); and
 - Infrastructure Development Plan (Autumn/Winter 2022).
20. Each district will maintain its own Local Plan work programme, and the districts are clear that 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 its own administrative area.
21. The County Council should benefit significantly from this approach which should enable evidence to be fully analysed across a larger related geographical area, prior to mitigation strategies being devised at a district level to support the connected and co-ordinated delivery of key infrastructure. It is hoped this approach to Local Plan making can be replicated in other parts of the County in the future.
22. The authorities agree the Duty to Cooperate is an ongoing process. The process for updating and maintaining this SoCG will be managed through ongoing joint work between the authorities.
23. The Director of Law and Governance advises that whilst this SoCG will be a planning policy type document, it will carry limited weight because of the lack of public consultation and limited detail it contains at this time. It is recognised that as work on the joint evidence the SCOG relates to and specific to County Council infrastructure requirements is undertaken, it is highly likely further iterations of the SoCG will come forward for consideration. It should also be noted that each emerging District Plan will require in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate provisions an individual Statement of Common Ground.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

24. There are no Equality and Human Rights Implications directly arising from this report.

Environmental Impact

25. The County Council will continue to work closely with partners to minimise the impact planned growth has on the environmental assets of Leicester and Leicestershire.

Appendix

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

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 23 November 2018 “Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan - Consideration of Revised Plan for Approval” - <https://bit.ly/3btffgf>