



Report to the Partnership for South Hampshire Joint Committee

Date: 05 July 2022
Report of: Claire Upton-Brown, Chairwoman PfSH Planning Officers Group
Subject: STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress towards completing the work identified in the PfSH Statement of Common Ground (SoCG). The report also provides some commentary on the planning reforms contained in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Joint Committee NOTES the progress made on the Statement of Common Ground set out in this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Joint Committee agreed a draft framework for the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) at its meeting in October 2019. This was subsequently updated and agreed as a formal SoCG in September 2020 and further updates were agreed at the Joint Committee meeting in October 2021.
2. The SoCG builds on previous extensive strategic planning undertaken by PfSH and sets out the strategic cross-boundary planning issues that need to be resolved at the sub-regional level, in particular the large housing shortfall of unmet need. The local planning authorities (LPAs) all rely on the SoCG to help demonstrate the duty to cooperate and the process for dealing with strategic issues as part of the evidence base at the examination of their local plans.
3. The intention is that the work under the SoCG will provide the evidence base that will lead to a new Joint Strategy to replace the 2016 Spatial Position Statement. The evidence base is focused on a comparative assessment of potential strategic development opportunity areas (SDOAs), as set out in the SoCG.

PROGRESS MADE ON STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND (SoCG)

4. The SoCG, agreed in October 2021, contains the following timetable for the two remaining workstreams.

| | Q4 2021 | Q1 2022 | Q2 2022 | Q3 2022 |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| SDOA assessments ¹ | | | | |
| Identify SDOAs and scope assessments/transport commission² | | | | |
| Procure consultants for SDOA assessments | | | | |
| Undertake assessments | X | X | X | |
| Procure transport consultants | | | | |
| Undertake modelling & TIAs ³ | X | X | X | |
| Finalise report | | | X | |
| Final report presented to Joint Committee | | | | X |
| Green Infrastructure Needs and Consideration of Mechanisms on how to achieve Green Belt Designation | | | | |

¹ This workstream incorporates Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment of the potential Strategic Development Opportunity Areas.

² Struck through text indicates that the stage is complete.

³ Transport Impact Assessments

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Establish green infrastructure needs through SDOA assessments (SA/HRA) | X | | | |
| Consider options for policy approach scope and procure landscape assessment | X | | | |
| Undertake assessments and further consider options | | X | X | |
| Review evidence and determine approach to green belt designation | | | | X |

The SoCG (para 3.56) states that it is anticipated that the Joint Strategy will be presented to the Joint Committee in Autumn 2022.

5. ITP, the consultants appointed to undertake the transport impact assessments and transport modelling, have completed the first two stages of their commission, i.e., transport impact assessments of potential SDOAs and transport modelling of three alternative development scenarios. The results have been presented to members of the Joint Committee and the technical work has been signed off. The final stage of this element of the comparative assessment work is to produce a transport mitigation strategy for the preferred development strategy.
6. Stantec, the consultants appointed to undertake the SDOA assessments, have completed the initial assessment of three alternative development strategies and discussed these results with the PfSH Planning Officers Group (POG) and presented them to members of the Joint Committee. The POG has expressed concerns about some of the assumptions used to estimate the capacity of potential SDOAs (i.e., that considering local gap designations and the need for land for environmental mitigation) the capacity estimates may be too high. Conversely, the local transport authorities (LTAs) have expressed concerns that the assumptions behind the capacity of the potential SDOAs result in densities that are too low to support effective public transport and will lead to new development that relies on the private car as the only realistic form of transport.
7. In considering the initial results of the comparative assessment work, Joint Committee members have expressed concerns that agreeing a strategy based on SDOAs for inclusion in the new Joint Strategy, may prejudice decisions on allocations in future local plans. In particular, where land that has not been taken forward in current local plans is being considered, with the aim of arriving at a preferred development strategy.
8. Following the feedback from members, the POG and LTAs, it has been agreed that the PfSH consultant and Stantec will hold individual meetings with the relevant LPA for each SDOA (or group of SDOAs) to establish the approximate capacity, taking into account constraints and opportunities to increase the amount of development in areas with good accessibility to public transport. The results will then be considered by the POG to determine the recommended way forward for the preferred strategy.

9. Land Use Consultants (LUC) have been appointed to undertake the 'Green Infrastructure Needs and Consideration of Mechanisms on how to achieve Green Belt Designation' workstream. Given the absence of a preferred development strategy the work is only able to be partly completed at this point in time.
10. Given the delay to the finalisation of the SDOA assessments, and the consequential delay to the Green Infrastructure/Green Belt workstream, the timetable in the SoCG will need to be amended when the document is revised and updated later this year (likely to be December Joint Committee meeting). Currently the delay is likely to be approximately 9–12 months.

LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

11. The government published the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill on 11 May. Of note for PfSH are the proposals to change the ways local plans are produced and the abolition of the duty to cooperate. However, the subsequent proposed changes to regulations and national policy and guidance are as important as the contents of the Bill itself in terms of understanding the impact for PfSH, and these are not currently available.
12. It is suggested that local plans will gain stronger legal weight and be made simpler to produce. The government still envisages local plans being produced within a 30-month timetable including two rounds of public consultation.
13. The draft Bill would repeal the duty to cooperate and will be replaced by a more flexible alignment test which will be set out in national policy. It is difficult to comment on how this might affect local plans in south Hampshire until further detail on the content of new national policy is available.
14. The draft Bill would enable groups of authorities to collaborate to produce a voluntary (but statutory) joint spatial development strategy, where they wish to provide strategic planning policies for issues that cut across their areas. This would only cover strategic matters and would not allocate land. This would be similar in format the spatial position statement or new joint strategy, but as a statutory document there would be public consultation, public examination and formal adoption stages.
15. The draft Bill does not give any indication of any proposed change to current government policy to 'significantly boost housing supply' or the use of the standard method calculation to estimate local housing needs. Whilst the abolition of the duty to cooperate may be welcomed by some local planning authorities it is difficult to predict what this might mean for local plan preparation until the proposed changes to the national planning policy framework and planning practice guidance are available.
16. The draft Bill will no doubt be subject to amendment as it passes through parliament and proposed changes to the national planning policy framework and planning practice guidance are expected. However, until new legislation is passed, inspectors conducting examinations of local plans will continue to assess plans against the existing legislation and government planning policy. The work carried out by the PfSH

authorities under the SoCG will continue to be needed to address the duty to cooperate and national policy requirements.

NEXT STEPS

17. The SoCG will be amended to take account of any changed circumstances – including updating the latest housing need and housing supply information to give an estimate of the current housing shortfall. It will also include a revised timetable for the evidence workstreams and production of the Joint Strategy. The proposed updates to the SoCG will be agreed by the POG before consideration by the Joint Committee – likely to be at the meeting on the 7 December. The updated signed SoCG can then continue to form part of the evidence base for local planning authorities to help demonstrate constructive and positive cooperation on strategic matters at local plan examinations.

18. The Joint Committee will receive further reports on any proposed changes to the national planning policy framework and planning practice guidance and the implications to produce local plans and the PfSH Joint Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Joint Committee NOTES the progress made on the Statement of Common Ground set out in this report.

Background Papers:

None

Reference Papers:

Draft Framework for PfSH Statement of Common Ground – Report to PfSH Joint Committee 14 October 2019

Statement of Common Ground – Revisions and Update – Report to PfSH Joint Committee 30 September 2020

Statement of Common Ground – Revisions and Update – Report to PfSH Joint Committee 25 October 2021

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