

# **Statement of Common Ground**

between

## **Wokingham Borough Council**

and

## **National Highways**

in relation to the

Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040

March 2025

## **1. Introduction**

- 3.1 This Statement of Common Ground has been prepared by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and National Highways (NH), collectively referred to as “the parties”. It sets out matters that are agreed between the parties in relation to the preparation of the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 – 2040: Proposed Submission Plan.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Duty to Cooperate, introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (amended by Section 33A of the Localism Act) places a legal duty on local planning authorities to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in the preparation of development plan documents and other documents. This is a test that local authorities need to satisfy prior to the local plan examination stage and is an additional requirement to the test of soundness.
- 2.2 The Duty to Cooperate specifically relates to ‘strategic matters’ which are defined as follows<sup>1</sup>:
- Sustainable development or use of land that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, (in particular) in connection with sustainable development or use of land for or in connection with strategic infrastructure which has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, and
  - Sustainable development or use of land in a two-tier area if the development or use— (i) is a county matter, or (ii) has or would have a significant impact on a county matter.
- 2.3 Paragraph 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)<sup>2</sup> also outlines strategic priorities that a local plan should have strategic policies to cover. They include:
- infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- 2.4 This statement has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 27 of the NPPF and the section of the Planning Practice Guidance on Maintaining Effective Cooperation.

## **3. Context**

### Local Plan Update

- 3.1 WBC commenced evidence gathering to inform the Local Plan Update in 2016. The plan-making process has been informed by opinions expressed through various consultations, including Issues and Options Consultation (2016), Homes for the Future Consultation (2018),

---

<sup>1</sup> Per Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

<sup>2</sup> The plan is intended to be examined against the December 2023 NPPF, as enabled by transitional arrangements in the December 2024 NPPF.

Draft Plan Consultation (2020) and Revised Growth Strategy Consultation (2021). A wide range of technical reports have also been completed, including reports relating to sustainability, landscape character, transport, flood risk, air quality, housing, economic and retail needs, and land supply.

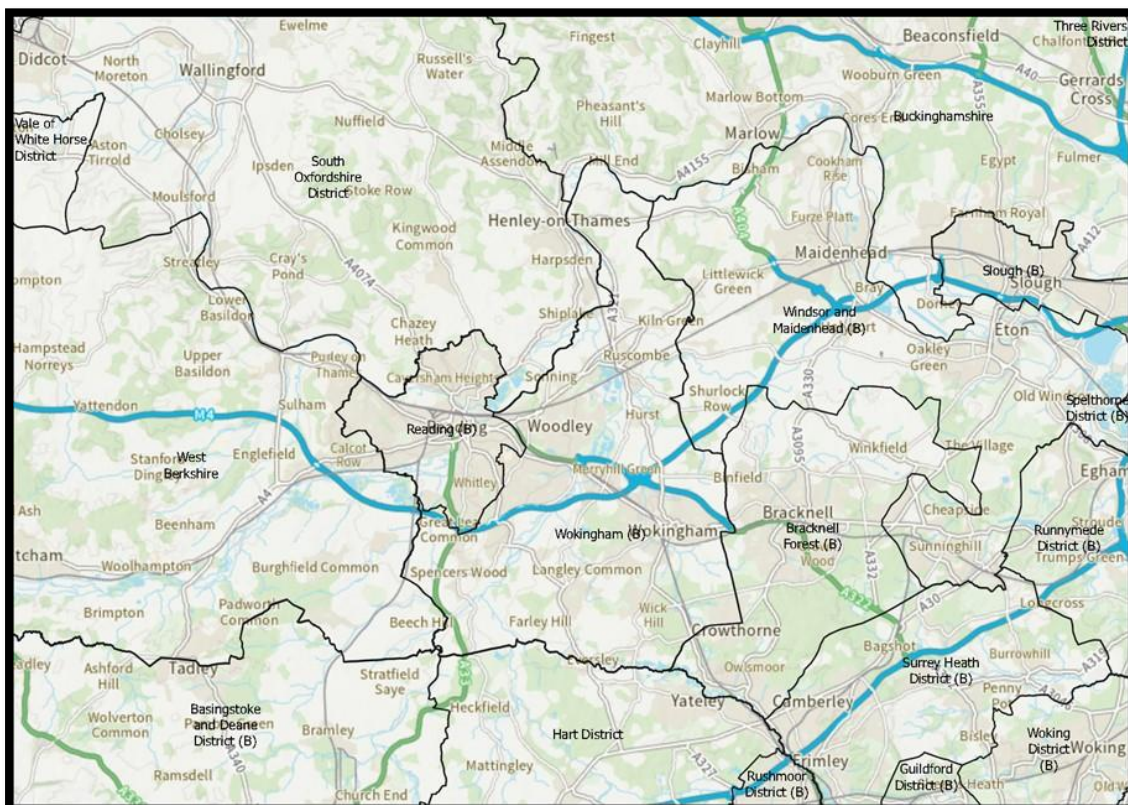
- 3.2 WBC invited representations on the Local Plan Update Proposed Submission Plan between 30th September and 13th November 2024. The plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State after full consideration of the representations received.
- 3.3 The plan is intended to be examined against the December 2023 NPPF, as enabled by transitional arrangements set out in the December 2024 NPPF.

### National Highways (NH)

- 3.4 NH is a non-departmental public body responsible for planning, designing, building operating and maintaining England's motorways and major A roads, which form part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN). NH is not responsible for other highways, which are the responsibility of the Highways Authority, which is WBC.

### Strategic Geography

**Figure 1: Map of local authorities**



- 3.5 Wokingham Borough is located approximately 50km west of London, in the heart of the Thames Valley and within the Royal County of Berkshire. The borough covers an area of 17,892 hectares and is characterised by a variety of settlements with the largest being

Earley, Winnersh and Woodley, which are in proximity to Reading Borough, and Wokingham.

- 3.6 The SRN in Wokingham Borough consists of the M4 motorway, and the A329(M). The A3290 from Winnersh north west towards Reading is not part of the SRN and is managed by WBC.

#### **4. Local Plan position**

- 4.1 NH have been engaged throughout the preparation of the LPU. This includes consultation at key milestones during the course of plan preparation, including the four Regulation 18 consultations. Additional detailed engagement has taken place outside formal consultations, including on the preparation of the transport model and transport assessments, with NH shaping these documents from inception, through initial drafts and thus informing the published evidence.

##### Engagement on the Wokingham Strategic Transport Model

- 4.2 NH have been consulted at various stages of preparing the transport model. For example, modelling was shared in October 2023 and again following updates in August 2024.
- 4.3 As a result of engagement with NH, a micro-simulation model was developed. The scope was shared and extended following further engagement with neighbouring local authorities including both Bracknell Forest Council and Reading Borough Council. NH has endorsed the transport modelling approach, including the microsimulation work.

##### Proposed Submission Plan

- 4.4 The NH commented on the Proposed Submission Plan in relation to specific policies and site allocations. A summary of these comments is provided below, with further detail provided in Appendix A.
- 4.5 NH welcome WBC's vision to provide sustainable development with a focus on reducing carbon emissions whilst promoting active travel and public transport use to limit car journeys and congestion locally, and on the wider network.
- 4.6 NH highlight current liaison with WBC to review the traffic modelling and associated impact of the Proposed Submission Plan contained within the Transport Assessment Report.
- 4.7 In summary, NH is satisfied the plan sound as currently drafted. Minor amendments to several allocation policies are suggested and additional information is sought on aspects of the transport modelling, however these matters are not related to soundness of the Local Plan.

## **5. Areas of agreement**

5.1 The parties have engaged effectively and on an on-going basis during the plan making process and WBC has fulfilled its duty to co-operate with NH.

5.2 The parties agree the following statements of common ground

- a) The Wokingham Strategic Transport Model provides a suitable basis for the preparation of evidence and engagement.
- b) The evidence supporting the Proposed Submission Plan is robust and proportionate to the plan-making stage of planning, including:
  - Local Highway Network and M4 Corridor - Transport Assessment Report, August 2024.
  - Addendum to Transport Assessment Report – Comparison of Alternative Strategic Site Options, August 2024.
  - Addendum to Transport Assessment Report – 2032 Interim Year Assessment, August 2024.

The strategic implications of proposals in the Proposed Submission Plan have been suitably considered and addressed, and the overall strategy promoted by the Proposed Submission Plan is sound.

- c) The evidence prepared is at a level of detail expected at this stage in the plan making process and sufficient to have a high degree of certainty regarding the delivery of the plan.
- d) There is no objection in principle to the overall strategy promoted by the Proposed Submission Plan, including the proposed allocations.
- e) There is no object to the principle of a new bridge over the M4, subject to formal assessment and design.
- f) The parties will continue engagement relating to plan-making as appropriate and necessary.

## **6. Areas for Further Work / disagreement**

6.1 Whilst there is no objection in principle to the overall strategy promoted by the Proposed Submission Plan, including the proposed allocations, WBC engaged with NH concerning questions regarding the traffic. A summary of these questions, and record of WBC's response to them is set out in Appendix B. NH's review of all of the information supplied by WBC concludes with the following observations and advice:

- a) The M4 J11 westbound on-slip could need a design change at some stage post 2040 without or with Local Plan traffic.
- b) Vehicle behaviours and the absence of 'live' MOVA control at M4 J11 in the local model (VISSIM) should both be addressed in ongoing use of the local model if it is to

realistically model traffic conditions at M4 J11 as well as on the broader highway network.

## **7. Governance arrangements including future review**

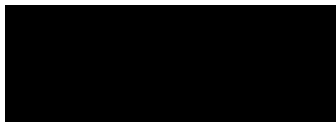
7.1 The parties agree to:

- Keep a dialogue open on matters arising which are likely to have significant impacts and implications for the delivery of the local plan;
- Work collaboratively to ensure that any necessary mitigations are secured, funded and delivered at the appropriate time, including maximising opportunities for the design of infrastructure to achieve flood betterment downstream;
- Review and update this Statement of Common Ground in the light of any material change in circumstance; and
- Maintain positive principles of cooperation.

## **8. Signatories**

8.1 We confirm that the information in this Statement of Common Ground reflects the joint working and engagement undertaken to date to address identified strategic matters. The parties will continue to work together to address cross boundary issues.

### ***Signed for Wokingham Borough Council***



Name: Trevor Saunders

Position: Assistant Director, Planning

Date: 7 March 2025

### ***Signed for National Highways***



Name: Patrick Blake

Position: Area 3 Spatial Planner

Date: 7 March 2025

**Appendix A: Summary of National Highways representations on the Proposed Submission Plan**

Summary of National Highways comment	WBC response	Agreement or need for further discussion
<p>National Highways welcome the vision to provide sustainable development with a focus on reducing carbon emissions whilst promoting active travel and public transport use to limit car journeys and congestion locally, and on the wider network.</p>	<p>Support noted.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p>
<p>Comments that National Highways would be concerned if any material increase in traffic were to occur on the SRN or at its junctions because of planned growth within the borough, without careful consideration of mitigation measures. It is important that the Local Plan provides the planning policy framework to ensure development cannot progress without the appropriate infrastructure being in place. When considering proposals for growth, any impacts on the SRN will need to be identified and mitigated as far as reasonably possible.</p>	<p>Comment noted. Policy SS15 Securing Infrastructure states that development proposals will only be supported where impacts are mitigated through the timely provision of necessary infrastructure.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p>
<p>Comments National Highways are currently liaising with the Council to review the traffic modelling and associated impact of the Local Plan contained in the Strategic Transport Assessment (STA).</p>	<p>Comment noted.</p>	<p>The parties continue to liaise regarding any queries regarding the transport modelling.</p>
<p><b>Policy SS13 Loddon Valley Garden Village</b></p> <p>National Highways expect the Loddon Valley Garden Village to be a sustainable site with a significant level of trip internalisation. It is essential that the master planning process for the site places the target of</p>	<p>Comment noted. Loddon Valley Garden Village will be a holistically planned, beautifully designed, and sustainable new community. The vision includes local services and facilities to minimise the need for unnecessary travel, and</p>	<p>No further discussion required.</p>

Summary of National Highways comment	WBC response	Agreement or need for further discussion
<p>reducing the need to travel at its core, whilst enabling active and sustainable public transport which can result in a modal shift away from private vehicle use.</p> <p>With the site bounding the M4, it is recommended the site promoters engage National Highways early to allow matters to be agreed early on.</p> <p>Comments the M4 bridge or improvements to existing infrastructure over the M4 will need to be DMRB compliant, in a suitable location and the construction arranged in collaboration with National Highways.</p>	<p>where travel is required, support opportunities to do this by active means such as walking, wheeling and cycling. Policy SS13 requires development to be devise and implement a comprehensive sustainable transport strategy that has been informed by a detailed Transport Assessment.</p> <p>Comment noted. WBC has made the site promoters aware of the request.</p> <p>Comment noted. Based on modelling it is likely that the M4 bridge would be delivered around 2032. WBC has made the site promoters are of this requirement which is programmed into their delivery phasing.</p>	<p>No further discussion required.</p> <p>No further discussion required</p>
<p><b>Policy SS11 Arborfield Green SDL</b></p> <p>The proposed development is likely to impact the SRN. The policy should be amended to refer to development not having an adverse impact on the SRN, as is included within Policy SS13.</p>	<p>Comment noted. WBC propose the modification to Policy SS11 as set out below to address the issue.</p> <p>g) Assurance that development will not have a severe adverse impact on the local and strategic highway network, nor an unacceptable impact upon highway safety, following the inclusion of suitable measures to mitigate the impact.</p>	<p>No further discussion required.</p>
<p><b>Policy SS12 South Wokingham SDL</b></p> <p>Comments that the proposed development should take account of all approved traffic on the South</p>	<p>Comment noted.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>



Summary of National Highways comment	WBC response	Agreement or need for further discussion
Wokingham site as committed development when assessing the traffic impact.		
<p><b>Policy ER1 Core Employment Areas</b></p> <p>Comments that all development proposals in Core Employment Areas and Strategic Development Locations should be assessed for their traffic impact on the M4. Attention drawn to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park and the Green Park Business Park.</p>	Comment noted.	No further action required.
<p><b>Transport evidence base Infrastructure Delivery Plan</b></p> <p>Comments it is important that mitigations which allocations are reliant on have a reasonable prospect of delivery within the identified timeframe.</p> <p>Comment that a review of the Transport Assessment has identified a number of issues where further engagement is required.</p> <p>Comments that the identified improvements at M4 J10 and J11, which are mostly on the Local Highway Network, require close collaboration with National Highways to ensure the M4 remains safe and operate efficiently. No funding has been identified.</p>	<p>Comment noted and agreed. It is anticipated that some planning obligations will include infrastructure delivery linked to development phasing.</p> <p>Comment noted. WBC actively engaged with National Highways to provide clarification on these issues, which are summarised in Appendix B.</p> <p>Comment noted. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan outlines that the expected source of funding for improvements to M4 J10 and J11 is S278 agreements. The IDP will be updated as planning permissions are secured. The evidence prepared is at a level of detail expected at this stage in the plan making process and sufficient to have a high degree of certainty regarding the delivery of the plan.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p> <p>The parties continue to liaise regarding any queries regarding the transport modelling.</p> <p>No further discussions required.</p>

<b>Summary of National Highways comment</b>	<b>WBC response</b>	<b>Agreement or need for further discussion</b>
	It is anticipated that some planning obligations linked to planning applications will include infrastructure delivery linked to development phasing. Appropriate trigger points will be explored and agreed with National Highways as necessary.	

**Appendix B: Summary of issues and responses**

Summary of issues	WBC response	Agreement or need for further discussion
<p>1. Observation</p> <p>Modelled Flows on the M4 (VISUM) – Delays, Queues &amp; V/Cs for M4 Junctions 10 and 11 Comparison of VISUM and VISSIM results, queuing more particularly, demonstrates the need for local modelling, as has been done.</p>	<p>Comment noted. VISSIM helped identify the need for local road network infrastructure to ensure congestion levels are managed outside of the SRN. These improvements have been identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and trigger points can be explored in consultation with National Highways when determining applications.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p>
<p>1. Trip Distributions</p> <p>The supplied PM peak hour TLDs are identical to those supplied for the AM peak hour. Please provide PM peak hour TLDs.</p> <p>Comment: We could not find any trip length distributions like those supplied in Stantec's 16/10/2023 note for National Highways ('Local Highway Network and M4 Corridor - Transport Assessment Report - Comment Responses') in the transport evidence. Please provide PM peak hour TLDs plus new AM peak hour TLDs if they have changed compared to those presented in the Stantec note.</p>	<p>WBC supplied all of the requested information. The trip distribution is explained in 3.4, 3.5 &amp; 4.3 of the Strategic Transport Assessment. Due to the limitations of data around the pandemic, the previously approved distribution from WSTM4 was retained. Additional (AM) information was provided as the key exception is that levels of internalisation have been applied to Loddon Valley Garden Village to reflect how proposed schools would affect trip patterns.</p> <p>WBC is publishing additional information considering some of the changes over this period to reassure various parties there is no need for sensitivity tests.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p>
<p>2. Modelled Flows on the M4 (VISUM) – M4 Eastbound &amp; M4 Westbound Flows</p>		

<p>Peak hour traffic operations at Junction 11 in their totality (i.e. the diverge and merge points of the off and on -slips respectively as well as the roundabout complex providing for local movement and M4 access/egress) require detailed assessment. Local VISSIM modelling has been done. CD 122 diverge and merge layout assessments need to be undertaken once the demand-related issues raised below have been addressed (i.e. Substantive Issues 3, 4 and 6).</p> <p>Comment National Highways could not find any CD 122 diverge and merge layout assessments in the transport evidence. Please supply updated versions of the data supplied in Stantec's 16/10/2023 note for National Highways ('Local Highway Network and M4 Corridor - Transport Assessment Report – Comment Responses') so that the need or not for CD 122 diverge and merge assessments can be re-visited by National Highways.</p>	<p>The technical note 'Merge and Diverge Assessment for M4 J11 (2032 And 2040 Assessment)' was provided to National Highways on 14/02/2025.</p> <p>The assessment for each of the off and on slips for the junction concludes that the current lane configurations can accommodate the forecast flows defined in the individual scenarios within the current design and that there is no requirement to provide any mitigation to the existing layouts.</p>	<p>No further discussions required.</p>
<p>3. Modelled Flows on the M4 (VISUM) – M4 Junction 10 &amp; M4 Junction 11 Flows</p> <p>Unexpected traffic flow changes from and to the M4 at Junctions 10 and 11 need to be explained in terms of broader re-routing patterns, especially given they are the product of fixed demand highways-only modelling. Inspection of the demand flows at Junctions 10 and 11 raised further questions.</p> <p>Comment</p>	<p>The note 'Addendum: Query 3 &amp; 4: Wider re-routing flow difference plots' was provided to National Highways on 14/02/2025.</p> <p>Overall, when comparing Local Plan Update scenarios to the Reference Case, the plots indicate no significant reassignment across the motorway corridors between the M3 and M40. Additionally, there are no major variations in</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>

<p>National Highways could not find any plots revealing broader re-routing patterns in the transport evidence.</p>	<p>motorway reassignment when comparing scenarios 1A and 1B, with and without mitigation.</p>	
<p>4. Modelled Flows for M4 Junctions 10 and 11</p> <p>Unexpected traffic flow changes from and to the M4 at Junctions 10 and 11 need to be explained in terms of broader re-routing patterns or network bottlenecks, especially given they are the product of fixed demand highways-only modelling. Inspection of the demand flows at Junctions 10 and 11 raised further questions.</p> <p>Comment National Highways could not find any plots revealing broader re-routing patterns in the transport evidence.</p>	<p>The note 'Addendum: Query 3 &amp; 4: Wider re-routing flow difference plots' was provided to National Highways on 14/02/2025.</p> <p>Overall, when comparing Local Plan Update scenarios to the Reference Case, the plots indicate no significant reassignment across the motorway corridors between the M3 and M40. Additionally, there are no major variations in motorway reassignment when comparing scenarios 1A and 1B, with and without mitigation.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>
<p>5. VISSIM Modelling – M4 Junction 11 westbound off-slip queuing</p> <p>Stationary or slow moving vehicles in the two westbound off-slip auxiliary lanes will present a significant safety issue.</p> <p>Comment Please supply National Highways with the current VISSIM models.</p>	<p>A link to download the VISSIM models was provided to National Highways on 14/02/2025.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>
<p>6. VISSIM Modelling – M4 Junction 11 Flows</p> <p>The VISSIM models need to be carefully inspected to determine the likely explanation(s) for reduced demands relative to the VISUM modelling.</p>	<p>Comment noted. VISSIM forecasts these conditions would arise in Scenario 1A and 1B. The Local Plan Update development does not materially worsen conditions.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>

<p>Comment</p> <p>National Highways continues to note a number of expected flow changes at M4 Junction 11. Please supply updated versions of the data supplied in Stantec's 16/10/2023 note for National Highways ('Local Highway Network and M4 Corridor – Transport Assessment Report – Comment Reponses') to re-create Tables 9a and 9b of 'Wokingham Local Plan Update Modelling Review' (19/12/2023).</p>	<p>J11 Off-slip already includes queue loop detectors to manage signal timings and minimise the risk of vehicles queuing back into the slip road.</p>	
<p>7. VISSIM Modelling – Model set-up review – Give-Way Behaviour</p> <p>The Scenario 1b AM and PM peak models need to be re-run with revised priority rules that simulate exit-blocking at the roundabout.</p> <p>Comment</p> <p>Have revised rules that simulate exit-blocking at the roundabout been applied to the VISSIM models? As above, please supply National Highways with the new VISSIM models.</p>	<p>No. The VISSIM model employs the default standard for give-way behaviour. The model has been shared with National Highways to verify this is the case.</p>	<p>Use of the default give-way behaviour model settings results in vehicles running over/through each other at M4 J11. See comment at Section 6.1.</p>