

Mayoral Combined Authority Board

14 November 2023

Local Planning Authority Regional Statement of Common Ground

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
Reason why exempt:	Not applicable
Purpose of this report:	Policy Decision
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Has it been included on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions?	Not a Key Decision

Director Approving Submission of the Report:

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Executive Summary

Local Authorities preparing local plans are under a statutory “Duty to Cooperate” with other relevant bodies in order to encourage and enable strategic planning across local authority boundaries. Statements of Common Ground play an important role in fulfilling this Duty. In 2020 a joint Statement of Common Ground covering the former Sheffield City Region (SCR) geography was agreed, to which the Mayoral Combined Authority was a signatory. An updated version of this regional Statement has now been prepared.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

The Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) will assist Local Authorities in preparing Local Plans and ensure cross boundary co-operation on strategic issues. Ensuring up to date Local Plans are in place across South Yorkshire helps deliver the Strategic Economic Plan by

providing up to date policies and proposals to support growth, protect and enhance the natural and historic environment and to provide certainty for residents and businesses.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

1. Endorse the updated Joint Regional Statement of Common Ground and agree to be a signatory.

1. Background

- 1.1 The role of planning in facilitating economic growth, housing development and environmental quality is well understood. Spatial planning can also support more inclusive growth by shaping the pace and spatial pattern of development; helping to create a more inclusive economy that maximises social and environmental benefits.
- 1.2 Local Authorities preparing local plans are under a statutory “Duty to Cooperate” with other relevant bodies in order to encourage and enable strategic planning across local boundaries. SOCG play an important role in fulfilling this Duty - they are technical planning documents required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and scrutinised by the Planning Inspectorate at the examination stage of Local Plans.
- 1.3 Strategic bodies like Combined Authorities are also expected to be engaged in the development of SOCG where they relate to relevant strategic matters such as the economy and growth. Combined Authorities are among several additional bodies that Inspectors at Local Plan Examinations would expect to see being signatories to joint Statements, helping to demonstrate cooperation on relevant strategic cross-boundary planning matters.
- 1.4 Specifically, Planning Practice Guidance states that:

“Additional signatories will be those bodies who have a role in the matters covered in a statement of common ground, and with whom an authority needs to cooperate in order to plan for these matters. These may include: other relevant public bodies (such as: Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, and the Marine Management Organisation in coastal areas); other authorities (such as county councils, combined authorities without plan-making powers, and strategic policy-making authorities outside of the area covered by the statement); infrastructure providers; or any other nongovernment organisations (such as advisory bodies) the authority cooperates with to address strategic matters through the plan-making process. This is not an exhaustive list.”

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 In 2020 the local planning authorities across the former SCR area developed a Joint SOCG covering several specific strategic matters relevant to all the Local Planning Authority areas. The Statement was agreed and signed by all nine Local Planning Authorities of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield, Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, and NE Derbyshire, as well as also being signed by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), the Peak Park Authority, Derbyshire County Council and Nottinghamshire County Council.

2.2 As part of its ongoing work programme the Heads of Planning group, which continues to include local authorities across the former SCR area, identified a need to update the Joint SOCG, reflecting:

- Changing national and local planning policy and guidance.
- Updated local data and evidence.
- Identification of further areas where strategic, cross boundary agreement would be helpful, including the increasing importance of cross boundary issues relating to climate change and the natural environment.

2.3 An updated Joint SOCG (see Appendix A) has been prepared which is focused on the joint agreed position of these Authorities on:

- Energy and Climate Change
- Housing.
- Employment.
- Transport.
- The Natural Environment.
- Waste.
- Digital Connectivity.

2.4 The SOCG is factual and does not contain any new policies.

2.5 The SOCG brings together existing policy and refers to published evidence so that this is readily available when required by a Planning Inspector. As such, the Statement will play an important role in supporting each Local Planning Authority to demonstrate the 'test of soundness' for their new Local Plans (as well as Local Plan reviews) by demonstrating how the Authorities are collaborating on a wider level to meet their Duty to Cooperate. As with the previous SOCG the SYMCA is being invited to also agree to be a signatory to the Statement in support of the Local Planning Authorities.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

Endorse the updated region-wide Joint SOCG and agree to be a signatory.

3.2 Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

Risks are managed by the Heads of Planning Group, reporting to the MCA Housing and Infrastructure Portfolio holder as required. Statements of Common Ground are intended to be updated regularly to ensure they are up-to-date and relevant, so any changes in evidence and circumstances can inform Statement revisions.

Option 2

3.3 Not to endorse the updated region-wide Joint SOCG. Each individual Local Planning Authority could prepare its own Statement of Common Ground as it produces a new Local Plan, without reference to SYMCA and shared planning positions.

Option 2 Risks and Mitigations

- 3.4 This option risks a lack of integration with wider regional activities and a disconnect between the Strategic Economic Plan, the emerging regional Growth Plan and new or emerging Local Plans, which could result in a more fragmented approach that negatively impacts on Local Plans being able to demonstrate conformity of planning policy with adjacent areas.

3.5 Recommended Option

Option 1.

4. Consultation on Proposal

- 4.1 The updated Joint SOCG has been prepared by the Heads of Planning Group and SYMCA Executive. The final draft SOCG was endorsed by the Heads of Planning Group at their meeting of 16 May 2023 following which it was circulated to all the authorities identified in paragraph 2.1, with feedback informing the final updated Statement at Appendix A.

- 4.2 Chief Executives considered and supported the Joint Regional SOCG at their meeting on 2 October 2023. The Portfolio Lead for Housing and Infrastructure considered and supported the final version on 26 October 2023.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Each Authority has been taking the SOCG through their formal governance processes to agree to be a signatory to the Joint Statement. All the four South Yorkshire Local Authorities have formally approved and signed the Joint Regional SOCG. Several other Authorities have also formally signed with others are currently completing their governance processes. At the time of writing, it is understood that all the authorities set out in paragraph 2.1 will approve and agree to be signatories to the Regional SOCG.

- 5.2 The evidence and joint positions set out in the Joint Regional SOCG will inform all future Local Plan processes and reviews across South Yorkshire and the wider former SCR area.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

- 6.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report. The MCA Executive has provided officer support to the Local Planning Authorities to assist in preparing the Joint SOCG.

7. Legal Implications and Advice

- 7.1 Statements of Common Ground are prepared by Local Planning Authorities in line with National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance. They do not constitute legally binding documents; however, they do form part of the evidence base which Planning Inspectors will consider when examining Local Plans.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

9.1 Local Planning Authorities are required to meet the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. Statements are prepared in accordance with these requirements.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

10.1 The Joint Regional SOCG includes background information on climate change and proposed agreements which reflect existing climate-related commitments.

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

11.1 There are no Information and Communication Technology implications arising from this report.

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

12.1 Statements of Common Ground will be referred to in Local Plan documents and will be made publicly available on SYMCA and Local Planning Authority websites alongside other forms of Local Plan evidence.

List of Appendices Included:

Appendix A: Updated Joint Regional Statement of Common Ground (May 2023).

Background Papers

None.