

## **INFRASTRUCTURE BOARD**

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

### **DRAFT SCR STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

#### **Purpose**

This report summarises the work programme being developed by the SCR Heads of Planning Group and presents a draft Statement of Common Ground, for endorsement by Board members.

#### **Freedom of Information and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972**

This paper includes a draft Statement of Common Ground for endorsement before a final version is approved by individual authorities and then the Mayoral Combined authority after the summer. It would be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme.

#### **Recommendations**

Board members are asked to:

1. note and support the work programme being developed by Heads of Planning;
2. note the requirement to prepare a Statement of Common Ground and its purpose to both support Local Plans and support Local Planning Authorities at Local Plan Examinations; and
3. comment and endorse the draft Statement of Common Ground (Appendix 1), subject to comments from Board members and other minor amendments prior to completion.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** As part of the Duty to Cooperate, Heads of Planning from across SCR meet on a regular basis to share information and expertise on strategic planning issues, as well as undertake joint pieces of work where these have been agreed as mutually beneficial.
- 1.2** Their aim is to support the work of individual Local Planning Authorities and inform local decision making, with a view to also provide consistently high-quality planning services across the city region.
- 1.3** Based on the outcomes of a recent workshop (involving representatives from the development sector and other stakeholders), the Heads of Planning Group have developed a joint work programme for the next 12 months (see Agenda Item 6). An early output from the joint work is a draft Statement of Common Ground, to which each of the individual planning authorities and the Combined Authority would be key signatories.

## 2. Proposal and justification

- 2.1 The Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) does not have a formal mandate for spatial planning at the city region scale, although local planning authorities across SCR work closely together as part of their Duty to Cooperate. 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.
- 2.2 The role of planning was also discussed by the LEP Board in 2018, with members emphasising the importance of planning authorities working together to help deliver the growth ambitions of the SEP and create a more consistent approach towards developers.
- 2.3 In light of this, the Heads of Planning Group are keen to ensure that they are well placed to respond to the needs of the city region and play a full role in helping to implement the ambitions of the LEP and MCA. The joint work programme for planning across the city region is the basis for their collaborative work, where there is a shared understanding that planning issues transcend administrative boundaries.

### Work Programme

- 2.4 The work programme provides a focus for collaboration on planning over the next 12 months and is designed to:
- Strengthen the role of planning in delivering the ambitions of the current Strategic Economic Plan (and further iterations) as well as more inclusive forms of growth.
  - Support continuous improvement of local planning services and greater consistency across different areas of planning; and
  - Ensure that local planning and wider city region initiatives are well aligned and able to respond to future developments.
- 2.5 The following key areas of work have been identified as outlined under Agenda Item 6. These represent relatively quick wins for the city region and cover:
- i) Duty to Cooperate
  - ii) Shared Planning Approaches
  - iii) Shared Evidence Bases
  - iv) Local Authority Recruitment and Retention of Staff
- 2.6 Appendix 1 provides more detail on the content of these workstream and the individual projects to be delivered for each one.

### Draft SCR Statement of Common Ground

- 2.7 A key piece of work to be prepared by the Heads of Planning Group is a SCR wide Statement of Common Ground; a technical document required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Statements are intended to record agreement on cross boundary, strategic matters between neighbouring planning authorities and other relevant bodies. They need to be produced, published and kept up-to-date by the signatory authorities involved and are a means by which it can be demonstrated that Local Plans are based on effective cooperation.
- 2.8 The geography for a Statement of Common Ground is not specified, but the Heads of Planning Group has been working together on a SCR wide Statement which they consider to be an appropriate geographical area due to, for example, housing market areas, travel to work areas, and the functional economic area.

- 2.9** Based on the work of the Group, a draft SCR Statement of Common Ground has been developed and is attached at Appendix 2 for consideration and endorsement by the Board. The Statement closely reflects the existing SEP although it is also being used to inform the emerging revised SEP and its evidence base. Future iterations of the Statement would be updated on an annual basis to reflect further joint work as well as the new, refreshed SEP.
- 2.10** Overall, the SCR Statement provides a benchmark against which updates can be compared as well as a mechanism for helping to align the SEP and Local Plans more positively. For example, Doncaster Council are producing their own Statement of Common Ground alongside the next stage of their Local Plan. This references the SCR work and the strategic matters on which agreement has been identified. It will be made available as a background evidence alongside the Publication version of the Local Plan (scheduled for Full Council in July).

### **Next steps**

- 2.11** The SCR Statement of Common Ground attached is still in draft and will be completed over the next few weeks, incorporating any comments raised by Board members and other signatories.
- 2.12** Following this, individual signatories to the Statement will be asked to sign the agreement over the Summer – for most districts this can be done by the Planning Portfolio Holder, under delegated approval powers from the Cabinet and Council.
- 2.13** Finally, a report would be taken to the September meeting of the Mayoral Combined Authority, for approval and sign off. The Heads of Planning Group would then be responsible for managing the Statement and ensuring that is updated in future years and as a new SEP is agreed.

## **3. Consideration of alternative approaches**

- 3.1** Without a formal planning role, planning activities at the city regional scale will remain non-statutory and focussed on supporting local planning processes. The Heads of Planning Group have worked together on an informal basis for over two years under the Duty to Cooperate and will continue to work on this basis.
- 3.2** Each individual local planning authority could prepare its own Statement of Common Ground as it produces a new Local Plan, without reference to the wider SCR activity and shared planning positions. However, this risks a lack of integration with wider SCR activities and a disconnect between the SEP and new or emerging Local Plans and result in a more fragmented approach that impact on local plans demonstrating conformity of planning policy with adjacent areas.

## **4. Implications**

### **4.1 Financial**

All activities set out in this report will be delivered from within existing resources. This includes officer capacity and time in participating local authorities as well as programme management support from the SCR Executive Team; supported by a limited amount of revenue funding secured through the Planning Delivery Fund (provided by MHCLG).

### **4.2 Legal**

The work programme includes several activities that will need to be undertaken within the usual planning regulations and legislation. The draft Statement of Common Ground has been prepared in line with NPPF 2018 and National Planning Guidance.

### **4.3 Risk Management**

Key risks:

- Individual authorities dropping out of the work programme or unable to support elements of the programme.
- Projects in the work programme contravening or conflicting with National Planning Guidance or current and emerging Local Plans.
- Disagreements between individual planning authorities on contentious planning issues.

The shared work programme and Statement of Common Ground are not mandatory and will only be successful if they receive continued support from Heads of Planning and participating local planning authorities. All risks will therefore be managed in liaison with the Heads of Planning Group on a regular basis.

### **4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**

Planning authorities are required to meet the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. The work programme set out above is designed to enhance and support this work at the local level by adding value and creating some economies of scale.

## **5. Communications**

- 5.1** The Statement of Common Ground will be referred to in Local Plan documents and would usually be made publicly available on council websites alongside other forms of Local Plan evidence.

## **6. Appendices/Annexes**

Appendix 1 – Heads of Planning Work Programme

Appendix 2 – Draft SCR Statement of Common Ground

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Other sources and references: