

West of England Combined Authority Area

(Bristol City, Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire)

Statement of Common Ground for Strategic Planning Version 1: Sept 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of a Statement of Common Ground

A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) is a document recording the collaboration between adjoining authorities in seeking to resolve cross-boundary issues. This statement is a record of the decisions made in addressing these through various discussions, and joint-working where appropriate. This is to fulfil the obligation set out in the 2019 National Planning Policy Framework to demonstrate ‘effective and ongoing joint working’ through maintaining a SoCG ‘documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these’.

An over-arching Statement of Common Ground for the WECA area

The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and its constituent authorities have decided to develop an over-arching SoCG documenting the strategic matters and issues to be addressed through either the Spatial Development Strategy and/or the constituent authority Local Plans. Wider signatories will initially include North Somerset Council due to the strong functional relationships across the area and will in later iterations extend to adjoining Local Authorities and other bodies with a significant role in an agreed approach to a strategic matter. The document reflects content recommended in national guidance and a template produced by the Planning Advisory Service.

Clean and Inclusive; the shared ambition across the West of England

The West of England Authorities recognise the value in agreeing high level shared objectives in shaping investment and other decisions. It has been agreed that clean and inclusive recovery and growth having regard to climate and ecological emergencies will be at the heart of the area’s strategic priorities for spatial planning and the UN Sustainable Development Goals will also be important reference points to help achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

Strategic matters requiring cross-boundary collaboration

In this first version of the WECA area SoCG, the following matters have been identified as having relevant cross-boundary dimensions to be explored through plan-making, initially through the evidence base which will help identify issues and opportunities that can be addressed through plans.

i. Carbon emissions and air quality

The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together through plan-making to contribute to tackling carbon emissions and air quality due to cross boundary movement, networks and other cross-boundary activity affecting emissions.

ii. Health inequality

The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together through plan-making to contribute to tackling health inequalities due to wider determinants of health being influenced at this spatial level.

iii. Housing

The West of England authorities have agreed to work collaboratively on preparing a Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) for the WECA Area and North Somerset to identify the quantitative and qualitative housing needs of the sub-region, including Affordable Housing. The West of England authorities have also agreed to work jointly on housing land availability, to ensure that they have a clear and consistent understanding of the potential housing land available in the sub-region.

iv. Employment

The West of England authorities agree to work collaboratively on a shared employment spatial needs evidence base covering the West of England Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA), with clean and inclusive post-Covid 19 recovery and growth and at its heart. This evidence base will have a broad scope covering the needs of the office, industry and warehousing sectors at a high level, consideration of retail and waste and the role and potential future roles of infrastructure (including digital networks, the port and airport) in the functioning of the economy.

v. Green Belt

The West of England Authorities will take a co-ordinated approach in the consideration of the Bristol-Bath Green Belt in the formulation of strategic planning policies.

vi. Development Quality

The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together to improve the quality of development, set high aspirations for place shaping and provide a consistent approach to engaging with developers to ensure new development contributes to achieving sustainable and inclusive communities, as well as local distinctiveness.

vii. Transport

The West of England authorities recognise the value in co-ordinating transport and spatial planning across their area, and that in order to best manage growth and cross-cutting priorities for change (including addressing the Climate Emergency) this involves consideration of a wide range of movement and connectivity including complementary digital networks. A new sub-regional transport model and associated WECA area appraisal framework will be an important part to this work, as well as other more focussed cross-boundary and inter-authority studies.

viii. Utilities including Waste; Security and Resilience; and Social Infrastructure

The West of England authorities recognise the importance of working together and with other infrastructure providers and commissioners to ensure infrastructure serving cross-boundary needs is able to accommodate growth and best support other cross-cutting priorities for change. This will involve multi-disciplinary working at a variety of scales to investigate opportunities and options.

ix. Green Infrastructure & Natural and Historic Environmental Assets

The West of England authorities, as set out in the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (JGIS), recognise the essential role that multifunctional GI plays in delivering resilient, healthy, well planned places as part of broader cross-boundary infrastructure planning and place-making work. Accordingly, they have agreed to continue to work in partnership on the delivery of the JGIS Action Plan, and review and add to JGIS evidence and content in order to continue to support its consistent application in plan-making, particularly in light of the Environment Bill.

The West of England Authorities acknowledge a need to work across boundaries to consistently assess and manage direct and indirect development impacts (including opportunities for enhancement) on natural and historic environmental assets, including building a resilient and robust Nature Recovery Network.

x. Minerals

The West of England Minerals Planning Authorities have agreed to continue to work together in producing their Local Aggregates Assessment, and to co-operate in and through the SW Aggregates Working Party in line with national policy and guidance.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Authorities involved in plan-making are required to cooperate with each other and other bodies when preparing plans which address strategic, cross-boundary matters. This includes strategic policies in spatial development strategies and local plans. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that these authorities should produce, maintain, and update one or more Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) throughout the plan-making process. A SoCG forms part of the evidence required at Plan Examination to demonstrate that they have complied with the Duty to Cooperate (DtC) and/or otherwise collaborated as appropriate.
- 1.2 It is intended that SoCG are signed by all parties to cross boundary discussions, including planning authorities and statutory consultees/other bodies with a significant role in an issue (e.g. in preparing evidence base or for the delivery of what has been agreed)¹. They track the plan-making process, being updated and re-published as discussions, evidence base and analysis, and other aspects of plan-making proceed² providing an accessible and public record of where agreements have or have not been reached on cross boundary strategic issues. In the event of significant changes to the planning system (as presently being consulted on) being implemented in the plan-preparation period, a more fundamental update may also be required which re-visits material in this version.
- 1.3 The activities which must be documented in a SoCG include:
- working together at the outset of plan-making to identify cross-boundary matters which will need addressing;
 - producing or commissioning joint research and evidence to address cross-boundary matters;
 - assessing impacts of emerging policies; and
 - preparing joint or agreeing strategic policies affecting more than one authority area to ensure development is coordinated, (such as the distribution of unmet needs or policies relating to county matters).

The requirement for a SoCG covering the WECA area

- 1.4 While the DtC does not formally apply to Combined Authorities, they are encouraged to be signatories to a SoCG. This reflects that collaboration across boundaries and with relevant bodies is expected by national policy to ensure a ‘sound’ development plan. This would include the plan that the West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

¹ NPPG Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 61-023-20190315

² NPPF Para 27

Mayor is required to prepare in agreement with the constituent authorities; a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

- 1.5 There is no requirement for each of the authorities within the Combined Authority area to be signatories to SoCG prepared for the SDS nor for the WECA Mayor to sign their respective Local Plan SoCG³. However, given considerable overlap in the issues, and the requirement for the WECA UAs to have SoCGs with each other for their Local Plans it is appropriate for there to be one WECA-wide area SoCG. This will cover cross boundary strategic matters that may be dealt with as strategic policies in the SDS or constituent authority Local Plans and will avoid a series of separate or bilateral statements. Supplementary Local Plan SoCGs will be prepared as necessary.

2. Parties Involved & Signatories

Initial Signatories

- 2.1 It is intended that SoCGs are signed by all those involved in cross boundary discussions, including the plan-making authorities and statutory consultees/other bodies with a significant role in an issue (e.g. in preparing evidence base or for the delivery of what has been agreed)⁴.
- 2.2 This SoCG concerns a range of strategic matters relevant to strategic policy-making in the WECA area which may be addressed through constituent authority Local Plans and/or the Spatial Development Strategy. As such the signatories reflect this rather than the precise scope of an SDS or respective Local Plan.
- 2.3 Signatories to this first version of the WECA area SoCG are the WECA-area constituent Unitary Authorities (UAs) (South Gloucestershire (SGlos), Bath & NE Somerset (B&NES), Bristol (BCC)) and WECA (including the West of England Transport Authority), together with North Somerset Council (NSC), pending further evidence base scoping and initiation. These are collectively referred to as the West of England authorities. This limited range of initial signatories reflects:
 - the particular relationship between BCC, S Glos and B&NES in collectively forming the West of England Combined Authority and legal presumption that strategic policies for those areas will be at least partly set out in a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS); and
 - the distinctive relationship between the WECA area authorities and NSC due to ongoing significant joint working and governance structures, reflected in being wholly part of the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) and Bristol Housing Market Area (HMA) which other adjoining authorities to the WECA area are not to the same extent.

³ NPPG Paragraph: 028 Reference ID: 61-028-20190315

⁴ NPPG Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 61-023-20190315

It is noted that NSC will be maintaining their own SoCG for their Local Plan with their own set of cross-boundary strategic planning issues developed through their own Duty to Co-operate discussions.

Confirming that agreement has been reached on the strategic matters as set out in boxes 1-12 in Section 5 below:

Organisation: North Somerset Council

Name & Position: Lucy Shomali, Director of Development and Environment

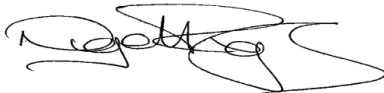


Signed:

Date: 23 September 2020

Organisation: South Gloucestershire Council

Name & Position: Nigel Riglar, Director of Environment and Community Services




Signed:

Date: 23 September 2020

Organisation: Bristol City Council

Name & Position: Stephen Peacock, Exec Director Growth and Regeneration

Signed: 

Date: 24 September 2020

Organisation: Bath & North East Somerset Council

Name & Position: David Trethewey, Director of Partnerships and Corporate Services



Signed:

Date: 25 September 2020

Organisation: West of England Combined Authority

Name & Position: David Carter, Director of Infrastructure



Signed:

Date: 24 September 2020

Additional signatories

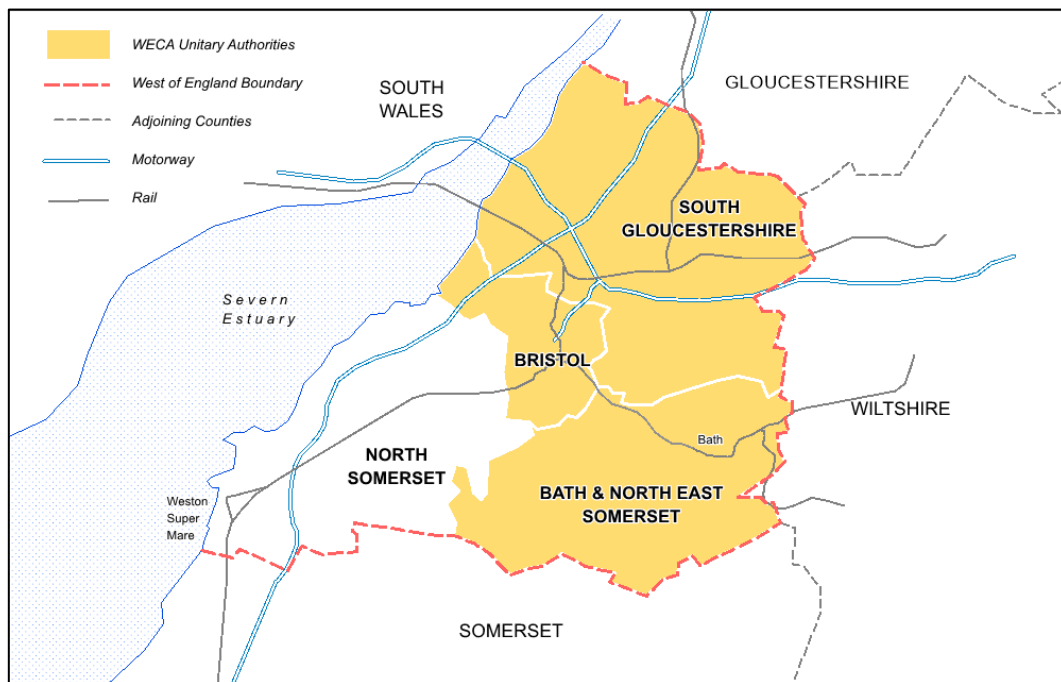
- 2.4 All authorities neighbouring the WECA area and other relevant prescribed bodies have been notified of the commencement of discussions regarding new strategic policies in the WECA area, and have been invited to collaborate as appropriate in strategic planning. The discussions have initially helped to refine views on the cross-boundary strategic matters to be tracked through the SoCG process, over what geography, and how this might be approached in process terms.
- 2.5 Reflecting the strategic matters set out below, it is anticipated that subsequent DtC discussions will therefore result in additional signatories to [at least parts of] the SoCG, depending on the extent of their input to the discussions and their outcome.

3. Strategic Geography

Description/justification of the area

- 3.1 The WECA area comprises the 3 unitary authority (UAs) areas of Bristol, Bath & NE Somerset, and South Gloucestershire. The population across the area is primarily focused on the city region of Bristol and Bath, together with a number of significant towns and an extensive range of villages. This area is brought together for strategic planning purposes by the West of England Combined Authority. This was established through the Devolution Deal signed with Government in 2017 which included a requirement to prepare a Spatial Development Strategy covering this geography.
- 3.2 The strategic geography for many cross-boundary matters also extends to include North Somerset, in a sub-region known as the West of England. This is an area over which there is a long history of joint working on planning matters reflecting the operation of the local economy and housing markets, as well as natural systems and infrastructure networks.
- 3.3 Beyond this, neighbouring authorities in Gloucestershire, South Wales, Wiltshire and Somerset have been approached to establish a wider area of co-operation, reflecting road and rail connections and other linkages that extend beyond the West of England, including the housing market relationships with (amongst others) Stroud and the towns to the west of Wiltshire.

Figure 1: Area covered by Statement of Common Ground



4. Governance and Joint Working regarding cross-boundary strategic matters

Governance and the SoCG process in the West of England area

- 4.1 The Statement of Common Ground is a record of decisions made, not the vehicle for decisions itself, therefore this section sets out how decisions are arrived at and confirmed.
- 4.2 In the West of England – i.e. the WECA area plus North Somerset, there are existing joint governance arrangements that can be applied in the SoCG process. Firstly, cross boundary strategic matters are discussed by technical officers from each authority with a view to arriving at an agreed position based on a shared interpretation of what is appropriate from a professional perspective, ensuring that this;
- Reflects their combined local and technical knowledge; and
 - Is legally compliant (in line with environmental, equalities and climate change legislation); and
 - Would pass the Government’s required ‘tests of soundness’ as set out in national planning policy (i.e. that what is agreed is positively prepared, justified, effective, consistent with national policy).
- 4.3 The resulting agreement is recommended to Leaders and Mayors via senior officers. Where the preparation of a version of the SoCG coincides with a key decision-making gateway for plan-making, it will be presented to the WECA or Joint Committee (depending on whether NSC are intended signatories) alongside other decisions needing their input, to confirm the final agreed position.

Joint Working Arrangements

- 4.5 The West of England authorities have signed an MoU committing them to work together on the preparation of an SDS for the WECA area, aligned appropriately with a Local Plan for the North Somerset area. Other joint working arrangements beyond this area also exist (e.g. the Western Gateway initiative, and the Western Gateway Subnational Transport Body). Joint working arrangements are set out for each cross boundary strategic matter in Section 5, as they have been agreed in relation to this MoU or already exist.

Governance relating to cross-boundary discussions beyond the West of England Area

- 4.6 The process for agreeing and confirming agreement of cross-boundary strategic matters beyond the West of England is to be defined through discussions under the umbrella of the newly established West of England Strategic Planning Forum (formerly the Strategic Solutions Panel (SSP)). This forum will come together periodically to review the conclusions of collaborative discussions between strategic bodies - to be included in subsequent versions of this SoCG - and sign them off. Membership of this forum is set out in Appendix 1, with the Terms of Reference requiring attendance by a person with appropriate authority to undertake such a signoff when it is convened to do so.

5. Strategic Planning Matters requiring cross boundary collaboration

Definition - considerations

- 5.1 The NPPF paragraph 20 sets out the key strategic matters that Development Plans must address (i.e. in the WECA area, across the SDS and Local Plans); it is for the authorities to define which issues need cross boundary collaboration to best address them. In doing so the following factors have been and will continue to be considered as plan-making progresses:
- Whether national policy requires cross-boundary exploration of an issue (e.g. housing need and capacity);
 - Whether the matter needs a co-ordinated or otherwise aligned approach to best achieve strategic objectives; and
 - Whether the development or use of land would have a significant [direct or indirect] impact on at least two planning areas.

The application of these considerations, the relevant geographical areas over which collaboration will logically [or already] occur[s], and any joint evidence base scoping in response to this is set out below. This also incorporates and takes into account the Climate and Ecological Emergencies, that have been declared by the West of England

UAs and by our adjoining local authorities. The identification of matters or in some cases specific issues should not be taken to imply at this stage that there will be an individual policy on them in either the SDS or Local Plans; this will be determined in an evidence-led way.

Strategic priorities and cross cutting issues

Clean and Inclusive

5.2 Given the long-established history of joint working, most recently reflected in the formation of the Combined Authority and Joint Committee arrangements, the authorities in the West of England recognise the value in agreeing shared objectives with which to shape investment decisions and other strategy. This is seen in the 2019 Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) for instance, which set out various agreed strategic objectives, including that growth should be clean and inclusive. With the impact of Covid-19, attention has shifted to securing economic recovery and the potential to re-focus the economy, but these principles remain very relevant in doing so. The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals also provide useful global reference points and help to recognise the linkages between social, environmental and economic issues given the planning system's aim to deliver sustainable development, particularly in light of climate change. Review of the UN SDGs will be used to inform the preparation of the WECA Spatial Development Strategy.

1. The West of England Authorities recognise the value in agreeing high level shared objectives in shaping investment and other decisions. It has been agreed that clean and inclusive recovery and growth having regard to climate and ecological emergencies will be at the heart of the area's strategic priorities for spatial planning and the UN Sustainable Development Goals will also be important reference points to help achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

Carbon emissions and air quality

5.3 Clean recovery and growth efforts are particularly focussed on reducing carbon emissions, not least due to all 5 West of England authorities declaring climate emergencies and the aspiration to accelerate the shift to a 'Zero Carbon' way of life. However, air quality more generally, (drawing in the issues of particulate and Nitrogen Oxide pollution) likewise requires a cross boundary planning response due to the nature of transport and energy networks and movements that drive both carbon emissions and wider air pollution problems. This is reflected in objectives of the recently adopted Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (covering the whole of the West of England) and the commitment to an early review to reinforce this.

2. The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together including through plan-making to contribute to tackling carbon emissions and air quality due to cross boundary movement, networks and other cross-boundary activity affecting emissions.

Health inequality

5.4 A similar cross-cutting focus relating to inclusive growth is health inequality, with many 'wider determinants of health' (such as active travel opportunity, air quality and access to green space) likewise playing out on a cross-boundary basis. SDS preparation legally must have regard to the impact of the strategy on health inequalities in the WECA area, making it a cross-boundary issue at least between the WECA area authorities. Public health co-ordination and NHS strategic planning to improve health outcomes already occurs on a cross-boundary basis in the area. Two Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) extend over local authority boundaries and include participation by the local authorities – one covering B&NES, Wiltshire and Swindon and the other Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. These bodies are represented on the West of England Strategic Planning Forum which provides a conduit for planners to engage with health bodies to ensure planning appropriately addresses such objectives.

3. The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together through plan-making to contribute to tackling health inequalities due to wider determinants of health being influenced at this spatial level.

Housing including affordable housing, quantity and distribution

5.5 National Policy requires that a sufficient amount and variety of housing is planned for to meet needs assessed by a prescribed national methodology (the 'Standard Methodology') and that the housing needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed. To determine the minimum number of homes needed, national policy requires that strategic policies should be informed by a Local Housing Need Assessment (LHNA), using the Standard Methodology and taking into account any relevant specified reasons for uplift, which relate to affordable housing delivery, transformational infrastructure investment, and economic growth ambitions.

5.6 In addition to the local housing need figure, the Government requires that any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account in establishing the amount and type of housing to be planned for. These factors require cross boundary discussions taking into account the housing market areas, sub-regional infrastructure investment and economic co-ordination (see below), as well as the explicit national policy requirement to ask neighbouring authorities if they have any 'unmet need'.

- 5.7 In turn, if a plan-making authority (including WECA) establishes it has housing need (or a type of housing need) that cannot be met through all reasonable forms of deliverable capacity within its boundaries, (and prior to considering Green Belt release) it must engage with its neighbouring authorities. National guidance sets out that the neighbouring authorities that fall within the same housing market area are particularly important to engage with in this context. Based on the 2011 census data, the WECA area comprises 2 Housing Market Areas, one based on Bristol that includes Bristol and South Gloucestershire and also North Somerset, and the other based on Bath and includes Bath & North East Somerset. This requirement and the nature particularly of the Bristol housing market area therefore makes housing capacity and distribution of growth, together with monitoring, a cross-boundary issue. This co-operation is particularly important in the West of England area because of the extent and focus of the two HMAs, whilst acknowledging housing market relationships extend beyond this notably into Wiltshire, Mendip and Stroud.
- 5.8 WECA and the 4 West of England UAs have therefore jointly commissioned a LHNA to ascertain both the quantum and the breakdown of housing need by unit size and tenure type across the sub-region to inform plan-making in both the WECA area and North Somerset. This will help to establish the Housing Requirement for the WECA area and the North Somerset Local Plan, including the approach to Affordable Housing (including the relationship between housing costs and household income). Other cross-boundary collaboration includes co-ordination of work in relation to meeting the specific needs of Gypsies, travellers and boat dwellers.
- 5.9 To inform plan-making the West of England authorities are also preparing a joint SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) methodology with equivalent consideration of employment land needs and opportunities, (together known as a HELAA – Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment). This will ensure that there is a clear and consistent understanding of the potential housing land available, suitable and achievable in the sub-region; alongside the LHNA, this will also inform the housing requirements for the different plan areas. In due course, as plan-making proceeds, this will be supplemented by more specific work testing plan viability.

Housing

4. *The West of England authorities have agreed to work collaboratively on preparing a LHNA for the WECA Area and North Somerset to identify the quantitative and qualitative housing needs of the sub-region, including Affordable Housing.*
5. *The West of England authorities have also agreed to work jointly on housing land availability to ensure that they have a clear and consistent understanding of the potential housing land available in the sub-region*

Employment, including retail, leisure and other commercial development.

- 5.10 The West of England was defined through 2011 Census travel to work data as a Functional Economic Market Area, data that has yet to be formally superseded. Despite changes in travel behaviour, most notably due to the removal of the Severn Bridge tolls, the functional economic geography does not appear to have fundamentally changed. Therefore, until new data is released enabling formal review, plan-making will continue to work with this geography, which also coincides with the extent of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- 5.11 Cross-boundary collaboration on employment issues will therefore be centred in the West of England area (i.e WECA area plus North Somerset) as this is the main area over which the local economy functions. The main focus of the collaboration will be on evidence-base, plan-making and monitoring concerning economic recovery and growth, distribution of employment-generating development, and the re-focusing of it on clean and inclusive principles. This will necessarily however involve analysis and understanding of property markets (and to some extent supply chains and consumption patterns) that extend beyond this into South Wales towards Newport, northwards to Tewkesbury, east towards Swindon, south west towards Bridgwater. On this basis, the 5 West of England authorities have agreed to jointly commission an Employment Land and Spatial Needs Assessment, (ELSNA). This will build on and further develop the LIS evidence base and more locally-specific evidence prepared to support Local Plans. It will focus on quantitative and qualitative spatial needs, (relating to employment land, other employment-generating spaces, supporting infrastructure and interrelationships between them) and opportunities and constraints in how they might be responded to through spatial strategy and other development plan policy.
- 5.12 The scope of this work will need to consider [at a high level] the future spatial needs of retail, commercial, leisure and waste employment-generating businesses, as well as more traditional industrial uses⁵ and a variety of supporting infrastructure including digital, and the role(s) of the port and airport. This is necessary to examine the full range of ways in which to respond to the sub-regional commitment to clean and inclusive recovery and growth. The scope recognises that many sectors have been undergoing significant change prior to and as a consequence of the Covid-19 situation which may present both new pressures and opportunities to respond to.

⁵ Recognising that recent changes to the Use Class Order introduce new flexibilities between retail, service and office uses

6. Employment

The West of England authorities agree to work collaboratively on a shared employment spatial needs evidence base covering the West of England FEMA, with clean and inclusive post-Covid 19 recovery and growth and at its heart. This evidence base will have a broad scope covering the needs of the office, industry and warehousing sectors at a high level, together with consideration of retail and waste and the role and potential future roles of infrastructure (including digital networks, the port and airport) in the functioning of the economy.

Green Belt

- 5.13 The Green Belt for Bristol and Bath urban areas extends beyond the respective authority boundaries (and beyond the West of England into Wiltshire and Somerset) so the role of the Green Belt and its spatial extent is necessarily a Duty to Co-operate issue. Any assessment of Green Belt in the WECA-area will be embedded in a wider approach to developing and testing spatial options for growth and change. This will be determined in due course and will take into account the requirements set out in national policy including co-operation across boundaries as necessary.

7. Green Belt

The West of England Authorities will take a co-ordinated approach in the consideration of the Bristol-Bath Green Belt in the formulation of strategic planning policies

Development Quality

- 5.14 Development quality in terms of design and its execution is a common concern across the West of England, particularly in relation to large scale housing developments, ensuring homes and infrastructure meet the needs of communities as well as regional priorities such as tackling climate change, health inequalities and air quality. With many developers operating across the West of England, this presents a strategic opportunity to enhance design quality across West of England Area. This 'larger than local' approach to design quality is in line with the recommendations of the 'Building Better Building Beautiful Commission' and is already being applied through the 'Design West' design review service which now operates across the West of England providing consistent access to advice.
- 5.15 The West of England authorities are presently working together to explore opportunities to enhance design quality through two commissions, both of which will inform plan-making, alongside existing work on landscape character and heritage (see below).

- A Placemaking Charter - to set out the aspirations and priorities for new development, drawing on input from stakeholders across the built environment sector.
- A research project with UWE (funded by the LGA) to address the challenges in maintaining design quality between planning permission and build out.

8. Development Quality

The West of England Authorities recognise the value in working together to improve the quality of development, set high aspirations for place shaping and provide a consistent approach to engaging with developers to ensure new development contributes to achieving sustainable and inclusive communities as well as local distinctiveness.

Infrastructure

Transport & connectivity including digital, and international via port and airport

- 5.16 Transport networks of all types – road, rail, cycling and walking routes – extend across local authority boundaries, as do movements of people and vehicles. Given the extent of the FEMA, these cross-boundary movements including those causing significant congestion and air pollution problems, are particularly focussed within the West of England, though clearly extend beyond it in all directions. Key international connectivity serving the sub-regional economy is also provided for within this geographical area, notably via the Port and Airport, with digital connectivity becoming increasingly recognised as a complementary strategic network. Managing the quality, connectivity and capacity of this infrastructure particularly in relation to growth but also unmet need, alongside related aims to focus provision on newer strategic priorities (notably clean and inclusive recovery and growth) therefore requires cross-boundary collaboration. This will be focussed within the West of England area, but will also extend beyond it along motorway and rail corridors notably to Gloucestershire, Somerset and across to S Wales.
- 5.17 The West of England has well-established joint working on transport planning through the Joint Local Transport Plan process, with a 5th iteration of this in preparation. Furthermore, the formation of WECA introduced an Integrated Transport Authority to manage public transport on a cross-boundary basis, ensuring public transport is provided and planned for on a coherent basis across the WECA area. Digital infrastructure planning, notably relating to the development of the 5G network, associated skills and market development is also a West of England-wide activity co-ordinated through the inter-authority ‘Smart Alliance’ and WECA. The West of England authorities in turn are involved in the [Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body](#) to collaborate on network planning and management on a wider cross boundary basis, (extending to Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, and Dorset including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) notably the Birmingham to Bristol rail corridor. The West of

England Strategic Planning Forum convened by WECA connects planners with other bodies (such as Highways England and Network Rail) as well as these bodies being engaged through other transport workstreams including the Strategic Rail Programme Board.

- 5.18 To inform transport infrastructure investment and spatial planning that will influence travel demand and carbon emissions, a new transport model for the sub-region is being commissioned, alongside a transport appraisal framework for the WECA area that will draw on associated data as it is made available. This will enable the development and testing of a variety of infrastructure proposals and wider development scenarios. Other work is also ongoing regarding the transformational potential of transport and movement infrastructure investment options in particular cross-boundary areas such as the Mass Rapid Transit project.
- 5.19 Digital infrastructure needs have been explored in part through the LIS, but will be revisited alongside transport infrastructure needs related to the functioning, and potential re-focussing, of the economy (on clean and inclusive principles) as part of the ELSNA study (see above), drawing on work co-ordinated by the Smart Alliance and WECA. This will include analysis of the possibility of embedding some of the more positive aspects of the Covid 19 situation in relation to reduced travel to work and increased home working, and the renewed focus on digital infrastructure that this brings.

9. Transport

The West of England authorities recognise the value in co-ordinating transport and spatial planning across their area, and that in order to best manage growth and cross-cutting priorities for change (including addressing the Climate Emergency) this involves consideration of a wide range of movement and connectivity including complementary digital networks. A new sub-regional transport model and associated WECA area appraisal framework will be an important part to this work, as well as other more focussed cross-boundary and inter-authority studies.

Utilities – energy/water/sewerage/waste

- 5.20 Utility networks connecting consumers with sources of energy and water and removing and processing waste water, together with other (transport based) movements of solid waste tend to cross boundaries. Examples of this would be the key reservoirs serving the Bristol urban area are located in North Somerset and B&NES and much of the sub-region's waste processing capacity based in Avonmouth within BCC. As with transport networks therefore, management of growth and other infrastructure needs, including Zero Carbon ambitions will necessarily involve cross-boundary collaboration. Increasingly this also requires collaboration between different utility companies.

- 5.21 The West of England authorities will work with the utilities providers and waste authorities to establish existing capacity for growth, potential to expand this and refocus infrastructure on new strategic priorities, and the implications of this for future development. This will in some areas be part of cross-boundary area-based studies and infrastructure strategy work and the ELSNA referred to above as well as through more general existing engagement arrangements (centred on the West of England Strategic Planning Forum) which will help inform the SHLAA and impact assessment. A Renewable Energy Resource Assessment (RERAS) is being undertaken across B&NES, SGlos and NSC to explore the most up to date position on renewable energy resources in the area and opportunities presented by this.

Security/resilience Infrastructure including flooding

- 5.22 Infrastructure supporting security and resilience is a cross-boundary matter insofar as it relates to cross-boundary movements of people, goods and threats (e.g. flood waters and other arising from climate change). Generally, however, security and resilience are managed as part of other aspects of infrastructure planning detailed in other sections, ensuring infrastructure is future proofed and able to respond to changes in circumstances. Flood risk management is partly a feature of cross-boundary green infrastructure planning, but also requires co-ordination of other physical interventions where these are appropriate across catchments and tidal reaches.
- 5.23 In the WECA area, flood risk along the Rivers Severn and Avon and their supporting tributaries, is the subject of cross-boundary co-ordination with support from the Environment Agency. The UAs maintain their own flood risk assessments, but the EA oversees this, ensuring application of a consistent methodology and appropriate updates in light of new catchment modelling, climate change scenarios and so on. This work in recent years has resulted in a joint strategic flood risk management project at Severnside, and will also contribute to the consistency of the SHLAAs in the area. Cross boundary area-based studies will also explore new flood risk management investment options in combination with other infrastructure.

Social Infrastructure - health, cultural and educational facilities of sub-regional significance.

- 5.24 Social infrastructure provision (including health, cultural and educational facilities) and management is of cross-boundary significance where its users come from an area that extends beyond the authority that the facility is based in, or where one or more areas face constraints to provision that are experienced differently in an adjoining area. In the WECA area, some social infrastructure facilities, notably specialist hospitals and higher education facilities are most efficiently provided in the urban areas of Bristol and Bath. This requires appropriate cross-boundary collaboration to manage the consequences of growth and to ensure that associated transport needs are addressed.

- 5.25 Health infrastructure need and management of capacity is managed through the partnerships referenced in the ‘health inequalities’ section above, with engagement with planners through the Strategic Planning Forum. Other social infrastructure needs/capacity requiring cross-boundary approaches will be explored as part of the ELSNA detailed above given their significant employment generation and wider economic role.

9. Utilities, Security and Resilience and Social Infrastructure

The West of England authorities recognise the importance of working together and with other infrastructure providers and commissioners to ensure infrastructure serving cross-boundary needs is able to accommodate growth and best support other cross-cutting priorities for change. This will involve multi-disciplinary working at a variety of scales to investigate opportunities and options.

Green Infrastructure

- 5.26 As with other infrastructure networks, green infrastructure (GI) can be managed and delivered to perform multiple benefits and services across authority boundaries. Given that in many cases these services complement and support those provided by other infrastructure, (e.g. green corridors may provide vital walking and cycling connectivity) the West of England authorities are also collaborating on managing growth and change in this field, ensuring appropriate co-ordination and aiming to integrate such a GI approach across infrastructure planning.
- 5.27 In preparing the West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy, (JGIS) the authorities, together with key environmental partners, have agreed and established consistent evidence and guidance concerning the wider benefits of green infrastructure to inform policy development and, the delivery and implementation of GI across a range of geographic scales. The JGIS sets out guidance which identifies approaches to ecosystem services and natural capital, potential for biodiversity net gains, and sensitivity of landscapes, ecology and the historical environment (as a landscape scale). The 5 West of England Authorities will continue to work with our environmental partners to develop the environmental data and technical evidence and deliver the Action Plan to deliver the outcomes and principles as set within the JGIS.

Sub-regional economic, place-making and ecological assets –

Natural environment

- 5.28 The WECA area is bounded by natural cross-boundary features of international and national importance – the two limestone landscapes designated for their outstanding natural beauty - the Cotswolds AONB lies to the east and the Mendip Hills AONB to the south, the Severn Estuary is an international wetland habitat. A plethora of international and national sites of ecological importance also exist in and beyond these

areas throughout the area. These are recognised to form part of the cross-boundary 'Nature Recovery Network' of ecological connectivity, (or potential connectivity) that extends across the West of England and beyond; an important aspect of climate change resilience to which national policy directs attention as well as climate and ecological emergencies.

- 5.29 Given the proximity of these natural assets to major areas of population growth and other change which may have direct and indirect impacts on them, it is recognised that appropriate management, including an understanding of potential impacts of development and how they may act cumulatively or in-combination, will need to be co-ordinated across boundaries. This is particularly focused on the West of England given the socio-economic relationships outlined above, but will be extended beyond this as evidence directs.
- 5.30 In light of this, the WECA area authorities have agreed initially to jointly commission an update to their 'Priority Habitats' data to maintain a consistent understanding of the spatial extent of the most important habitats and their sensitivity to change. This will be co-ordinated with work in North Somerset focussing on priority species. It will in turn enable an update to the West of England Nature Recovery Network mapping undertaken by the local Nature Partnership (WENP) and other work through the JGIS (see above) which will highlight where there may be opportunities to enhance resilience and secure net gain, responding to the Environment Bill as necessary. It will also inform the SHLAAs and subsequent impact assessment, including the development of any necessary mitigation measures.

Historic Environment –

- 5.31 Many distinctive cross-boundary physical landscapes have cultural and historic significance, and the WECA-area also has numerous other historic sites and features, including the whole-city World Heritage Site of Bath, the setting of which transcends local authority boundaries. As with natural assets, the role these assets play in the WECA-area and impacts on them arising from development, may be both immediate (on site, or due to adjacent development) and connected to development and experience in a much wider, cross-boundary area. This is through people's behaviour, (e.g. visiting patterns, connections with the wider tourist offer) sight lines and so on. It is therefore appropriate to align [high level] management of these with other cross-boundary work, notably on development capacity.
- 5.32 Cross boundary evidence base co-ordination as set out above has been at a landscape scale through the JGIS. This provides consistent information to support the SHLAAs and impact assessments.

Green Infrastructure & Natural and Historic Environmental Assets

10. The West of England authorities, as set out in the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (JGIS), recognise the essential role that multifunctional GI plays in delivering resilient, healthy, well planned places as part of broader cross-boundary infrastructure planning and place-making work. Accordingly, they have agreed to continue to work in partnership on the delivery of the JGIS Action Plan, and review and add to JGIS evidence and content in order to continue to support its consistent application in plan-making, particularly in light of the Environment Bill.
11. The West of England Authorities acknowledge a need to work across boundaries to consistently assess and manage direct and indirect development impacts (including opportunities for enhancement) on natural and historic environmental assets, including building a resilient and robust Nature Recovery Network .

Minerals

- 5.33 Minerals reserves following landscape lines, and transport movements between source sites and areas of processing and use likewise cross authority boundaries. The West of England UAs as Minerals Planning Authorities work together to produce a joint Local Aggregates Assessment enabling the sharing of specialist minerals planning resource and the maintenance of commercial confidentiality, which is important given the small number of operators active across the area. They also co-operate in and through the wider South West Aggregates Working Party structure.
- 5.34 In doing so, they work together to assess needs, including for associated cross-boundary transport infrastructure (e.g. railheads and ports), and plan for a steady and adequate supply through preparing their Local Plans, and these arrangements are intended to continue.

12. Minerals

The West of England Minerals Planning Authorities have agreed to continue to work together in producing their Local Aggregates Assessment, and to co-operate in and through the SW Aggregates Working Party in line with national policy and guidance.

6. Timetable for Review and Update

- 6.1 The WECA-area Statement of Common Ground will evolve as plan-making progresses. It will be regularly reviewed and updated as agreement is reached on particular issues, acknowledging that signatories may change at different stages and according to the issues in focus. If changes to the planning system are introduced in this period, review of this initial 'baseline' content regarding strategic matters, relevant geographies and evidence base will also be undertaken.

Key SDS gateway decisions

- 6.2 The SoCG will be re-published and updated as necessary to reflect gateway decisions for SDS plan-making, namely its inception, the agreement of the consultation draft and if necessary, the agreement of the submission version (with any proposed amendments to the consultation draft).

Other review dates

- 6.3 In-between these key dates, plan-making will progress as the evidence base starts to develop, informing discussions concerning issues and opportunities to address them. This will include discussions with other neighbouring authorities regarding unmet need, (if any arises/has arisen elsewhere).
- 6.4 WECA-area UA Local Plan consultation stages will also fall between (and beyond) these dates and so the SoCG will also be published alongside these. The SoCG will be finalised for the SDS on its submission for examination, but will also be taken forward by each of the constituent UAs into their Local Plan pre-submission processes.

Next Steps

- 6.5 The next steps are to convene bilateral/smaller group discussions under the umbrella of the Strategic Planning Forum as part of the technical evidence-led exploration of the issues relating to particular strategic matters, opportunities to address them through the SDS and UA Local Plans, and understanding of differential impacts of possible spatial responses.

Appendix 1: Strategic Planning Forum Membership, August 2020

Name	Role	Organisation
David Carter	Director of Infrastructure	WECA
Laura Ambler	Head of Regional Planning & Housing	WECA
Jason Humm	Head of Transport	
Kathryn Vowles	Head of Capital Delivery	
Richard Cresswell	Chair	Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership
Patric Bulmer	Head of Water Resources and Environment	Bristol Water
Dave Pring	Planning Specialist	Environment Agency
Richard Ormerod	Growth & Improvement Team Leader South West	Highways England
Rohan Torkildsen	Partnerships Team Leader South West	Historic England
Philip Farrell	Head of Accelerated Delivery SW	Homes England
Russell Baldwinson	Exec Director of Development	LiveWest
Matthew Heard	Area Manager	Natural England
Malcolm Parsons	Industry Programme Director, West of England	Network Rail
Tracey Cox	Chief Executive	NHS B&NES, Swindon and Wilts CCG
Julia Ross	Chief Executive	NHS Bristol, North Som and South Glos CCG
Oliver Lancaster	Future of Energy Manager	Wales & West Utilities
Selena Gray	Chair	WENP
Ruth Barden	Head of Environment and Catchment Strategy	Wessex Water

Christian Hjelm	Distribution Manager	Western Power Distribution
Jon Rattenbury	Manager	SW Energy Hub
Christine Gore	Strategic Director	Cotswold District Council
Peter Williams	Head of Planning	Forest of Dean District Council
Simon Excell	Lead Commissioner Strategic Infrastructure	Gloucestershire County Council
Julie Reader-Sullivan	Planning & Growth Group Manager	Mendip District Council
Brenden Cleere	Strategic Director of Place	Stroud District Council
Sam Fox	Director of Economic Development and Planning	Wiltshire Council
Beverly Owen	Strategic Director	Newport City Council
Andrew Gregory	Director of Planning, Transport and Environment	Cardiff City Council
Tom Evans	Strategic Planning Team Leader	Swansea Council
Will McClean	Head of Policy and Partnerships	Monmouthshire County Council
Karen Ross	Planning & Housing team Manager	WECA
Sophie Donaldson	Strategic Planning & Policy Lead	WECA
Zoe Willcox	Director: Development of Place	Bristol City Council
Richard Kent	Head of Planning	North Som Council
Brian Glasson	Head of <i>Strategic Planning and Housing</i>	South Glos Council
Lisa Bartlett	Director of Development and Public Protection	B&NES Council

NB – other officers from WECA and the authorities to attend / deputise as appropriate