Introduction

Preparation of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan

What is this document?

1.1 This document is the pre-submission publication of the new South Gloucestershire Local Plan (SGLP). It is the version that the Council intends to submit to the Secretary of State for examination in accordance with legislation set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. When adopted it will form part of the Development Plan for the district.

1.2 As the Plan is now at Regulation 19 (Phase 5 in Figure 1.1 below) the process has moved from engaging with our communities and stakeholders on shaping the content of the document, to enabling interested parties to comment – known as 'making representations', on the draft plan and supporting information before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. It's not that we don't want to engage and discuss the plan, however in accordance with the regulatory procedures we need to ask people to identify if there are issues they want to raise against the Plan. At this stage it is not the Council who will assess and consider the comments, which under this tightly defined process are called duly made representations, but instead these will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration at the examination. Details about how to comment on the Plan will be available on our website Have Your Say Today - Local Plan Reg 19 - Commonplace.

1.3 Accordingly, the SGLP at this stage sets out a new strategy to guide and manage development and change in our area over the period up to 2041 with the overall purpose to:

- identify the amount and types of new development required in the district to meet the needs of local residents and businesses and allocate sites to accommodate this level of development;
- sets out how development will be delivered in a sustainable manner through a range of policies and guidance to manage the form and quality of new development that will shape the places that we live, work and socialise in;
- maintain and enhance the quality of life, and tackle inequalities;
- have a positive impact on Council's commitment to addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies, and delivering a green economy.

How to make representations?

1.4 The Council is seeking representations on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on legal compliance, compliance with the Duty to Cooperate and the four tests of soundness. The tests of soundness are whether the plan is:

- **positively prepared** – providing a strategy which as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- **justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and is based on proportionate evidence;
- **effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statements of common ground; and
- **consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF.

1.5 Representations should relate to the tests of soundness for local plans as explained in para 1.4 above. Further details on this process and to how to make representations are available on our consultation webpage Have Your Say Today - Local Plan Reg 19 - Commonplace

What will happen to my representations?

1.6 Following consultation on this document, the SGLP will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government who will appoint an Inspector to examine the Plan. All feedback received during this stage will be passed on to the Inspector for consideration as part of the examination of the SGLP. The representations and a summary of the issues that they raise will be published on the Council's website at Have Your Say Today - Evidence base - Local Plan Reg 19

What if I previously made comments?

1.7 Comments made to the earlier versions of the SGLP (Regulation 18, Phases 1-4 along with summaries of the key issues raised, and how they have helped prepare this publication version of the SGLP are available to view on our website at Have Your Say Today - Evidence base - Local Plan Reg 19

The Plan making process

1.8 The SGLP has been prepared within the context of a hierarchical framework of planning legislation and policy for England. At the top of the hierarchy are a number of planning related Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024[1]) which sets out Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied, and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). Local authorities must take the NPPF into account when preparing Local Plans; this means that the Council should follow national policy unless there is local evidence and circumstances that would justify a different approach.

1 In accordance with NPPF 2024 paragraphs 234a and 235.

1.9 It has also taken account of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which provides further guidance about national policy and its implementation. Other legal frameworks, including the European Habitats Directive, are also relevant to the plan making process.

1.10 In preparing the SGLP, the Council has followed the processes outlined in the Town and Country (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. In so doing it has been informed by; by the Council's strategic vision set out in the Council Plan; a collection of research and information documents called the 'Evidence Base' and extensive stakeholder consultation and engagement with our local communities, specific consultation bodies, organisations. The Council is grateful to our communities and partners who have helped prepare our new Local Plan.

1.11 When work began on the Local Plan in 2020, the strategic planning context for South Gloucestershire was intended to be provided through the West of England Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). That plan was halted in May 2022 and is now not being progressed. As a consequence, the strategic planning context for the South Gloucestershire Local Plan is established through the process of cooperation with our neighbouring councils.

1.12 A summary of the process is set out in Figure 1.1.

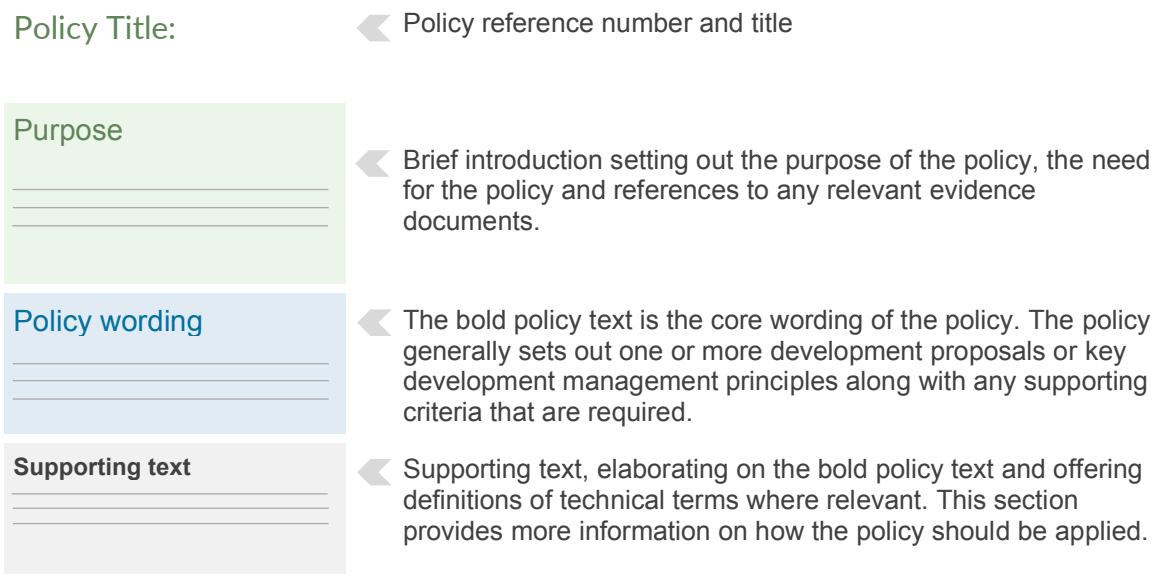
Figure 1.1 A summary of the SGC Plan making process

Stage	Description	Date Completed/ expected to be completed
Phase 1 - Issues and Approaches	Discussed the key issues and set out priorities for achieving sustainable development. It also explored alternative 'building blocks' for new development and potential locations, alongside the proposed range and scope of policies for the new Plan and 9 draft policies.	Completed 27th November 2020 to 1st March 2021
Phase 2 - Urban, Rural and Key Issues	Provided further detail on the approach that could be taken in urban areas, market towns and rural villages, including places that might be appropriate for new homes and jobs, along with proposed approach to renewable energy and green infrastructure and 5 draft policies. Up until this point, the Local Plan was being developed within the context of a sub-regional Spatial Development Strategy covering the West of England area.	*Completed* 7th February 2022 to 4th April 2022
Phase 3 - Towards a Preferred Strategy	Explained that the West of England authorities were no longer developing a Spatial Development Strategy. As a result, SGC was now responsible for determining the scale of housing, employment and infrastructure required from the Local Plan and a strategy for how this will be achieved. The Phase 3 document set out the key planning approaches and issues which are	Completed 6th December 2023 to 16th February 2024

	required to deliver the homes and jobs needed and presented three alternative 'lenses' for meeting these needs, to explore the implications of different spatial strategies. The lenses were used to inform and explain the key principles and proposed allocations in an emerging preferred strategy alongside an approach to Traveller communities, areas to be safeguarded for renewable energy and safeguarding for minerals and 14 draft policies.	
Phase 4 - Topic Paper for Housing Land Supply and Bristol Unmet Need	To assist to set out the Council's position with regard to: 1. Provision of further clarification on the process for how the lenses used to apportion site locations were chosen, and the process of site selection to form part of the Emerging Spatial Strategy. 2. Provision of additional supply to provide greater flexibility to meet South Gloucestershire's housing needs. 3. The Council's approach to considering whether it can assist with any of Bristol City Council's (BCC) unmet housing need to ensure the Council continues to discharge the duty to co-operate under s.33 A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 on the cross-boundary strategic issue of BCC's unmet housing need	Completed 19th July to 13th September 2024
Phase 5	This is the stage we have reached now Preferred Spatial Strategy and supporting policy framework (Regulation 19 Publication stage)	28th February 2025
Phase 6	Submission of the Plan to Secretary of State (Regulation 22) Submission of Plan and representations to Secretary of State	September 2025
Phase 7	Examination Hearings Period (Regulation 24) Examination by independent inspector and public hearings	March to October 2026
Phase 8	Publication of Inspector's Report and recommendations (Regulation 25) Recommendations to make the Local Plan 'sound'.	November 2026
Phase 9	Adoption of the Plan (Regulation 26) This is the point at which the Local Plan formally becomes part of the statutory development plan and takes full effect in the determination of planning applications.	December 2026

How to read the policies

1.13 The policies in the SGLP publication version are set out as follows:



Key Diagram

1.14 The key Diagram set out in the Setting the Scene section below and in Policy LPS2 Locational Strategy for South Gloucestershire provides an overview of the broad locations designated for strategic development within the District. It is crucial to understand that the symbols on the key diagram are illustrative and do not represent precise locations or sites. More detailed visual information is available on the Policies Map that accompanies the SGLP. This map identifies areas earmarked for protection, strategic sites and strategic infrastructure, while specifying the areas where specific policies are applicable.

Assessments and evidence

1.15 The SGLP is accompanied by:

- Sustainability appraisal/strategic environmental assessment (SA/SEA) that considers the impact of policies on the community, the economy and the environment.
- a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) which assesses the likely impacts of the SGLP policies on the integrity of national and European designated nature sites.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) which considers the implications for members of the community

1.16 Local plans are also required to be based on adequate, up-to-date and proportionate evidence. A comprehensive evidence base has been developed to support and inform the SGLP strategy and policies and forms part of the suite of documents that the Council is consulting upon. This evidence is a combination of documents that have informed the plan and new evidence used to determine the District's objectively assessed needs. Further details in relation to the evidence base for the SGLP can be accessed through the following link: Have Your Say Today - Evidence base - Local Plan Reg 19

1.17 In some places in this document you will see it refers to further guidance being prepared. This may take the form of supplementary planning documents or further policy guidance. As these are prepared, they will be subject to public consultation. You can find out more about this programme in our Local Plan Delivery Programme | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council.

List of policies

1.18 The current suite of adopted policies in the Core Strategy and Policies, Sites and Places DPD will remain in effect until the new SGLP is adopted. Once adopted the new SGLP will replace and consolidate many policies and site allocations in these previously adopted Plans. We also understand that there may be some things that you might expect to be in this document that are not. This is because when we looked at the wording of the previously approved policies it was considered these were still appropriate, so we have 'saved' those policies, which means they will have the same status as the policies in this document when they are adopted. Further details in relation to the policies that will be replaced and those that will be saved can be found in Appendix 2 Existing Core Strategy and Policies, Sites and Places Policies., The NPPF[2] requires Local Plans to include strategic policies to address priorities for the development and use of land and distinguish strategic policies from other non-strategic policies. Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for: a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development; b) 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); c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Relationship with other plans and strategies

1.19 England and Wales operate a 'plan led' planning system. This means that the development plan is the first consideration in determining planning applications. This Local Plan also provides an up-to-date framework for local communities who are preparing Neighbourhood Plans which must be consistent with national policies and the strategic policies of the Local Plan.

2 Paragraphs 17, 18 and 20 of the NPPF

1.20 The SGLP embeds the strategic visions and objectives of the Council's other plans and strategies and is the main delivery mechanism for the spatial elements of its Council Plan setting out the Council's vision, objectives and strategic planning framework that will guide future development for the next 15 years.

1.21 Neighbourhood Plans must be consistent with national policies and the strategic policies of the Local Plan. The new SGLP will sit alongside the adopted Neighbourhood Plans, which form part of our Development Plan for South Gloucestershire. Details of the 'made' neighbourhood plans in South Gloucestershire are available at Neighbourhood planning | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council.

Duty to Cooperate

1.22 Section 110 of the Localism Act (2011), subsequent regulations and the NPPF, impose a legal obligation on local planning authorities to cooperate with each other, and other bodies, when formulating policies related to strategic matters and on areas of common interest. It is important to emphasise that the duty to cooperate is an ongoing process that involves reviewing policies, their rationale, and their potential effects on neighbouring authorities and organisations. The duty remains relevant at all stages of the plan making process up to the point the Plan is submitted.

1.23 An interim Duty to Cooperate position has been provided as part of the Engagement Report that supports this Regulation 19 document. This details the bodies engaged under the Duty throughout the SGLP's preparation, the strategic issues that were identified and the outcomes that influenced policy formulation. It will be updated before submission to the Secretary of State (Phase 6) with the SGLP, in addition to other supporting documents.

Monitoring

1.24 It is important to assess whether the SGLP is fulfilling its aims and objectives. It is equally important to establish appropriate and effective mechanisms to enable the Council to take action if the Plan is not achieving its objectives. Monitoring indicators for the SGLP are set out under each policy and are also outlined in Appendix 3 – Monitoring Arrangements.

1.25 The performance of policies will be assessed and reported through the Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR). If certain policies are failing in delivering the required outcomes, appropriate actions will be identified. This will also help inform a future review of the SGLP.

Next Steps

1.26 Following consultation on this document, the SGLP will be submitted to the Secretary of State who will appoint an Inspector to examine the Plan. All feedback received during this stage will be passed on to the Inspector for consideration as part of the examination of the SGLP.