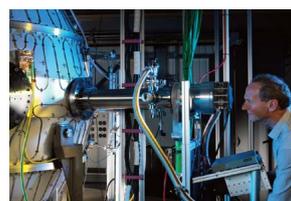


# Draft Settlement Assessment Methodology

South Oxfordshire and  
Vale of White Horse  
District Councils

May 2022



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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are in the process of preparing a Joint Local Plan to guide development in the districts up to 2041. Having a strong understanding of the nature of the towns, villages and smaller settlements in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse is a key part of our evidence base and assists with forming a robust strategy for the future of our districts in our Joint Local Plan.
- 1.2. The settlement assessment we produce will look at settlements in the districts to provide an understanding of how well residents' everyday needs are met living in a particular area. It will also give an indication of what might help us to facilitate thriving and healthy communities. To do this we need to understand the profile of settlements and the level of services available. The proposed assessment will therefore look at topics such as population, households, employment provision, retail services, education facilities, proximity to other settlements offering different or a wider variety services and facilities, and availability and quality of transport connections.
- 1.3. This report provides background information to and sets out the proposed methodology for the settlement assessment. It identifies the process we propose to collect data, how we propose to analyse that data, how we will report it and how you will be able to review and comment on the findings of the assessment. This methodology will be kept under review and updated where appropriate, considering feedback to public consultation and data gathering and analysis.
- 1.4. This work will provide a comprehensive picture of the settlements across the two districts. Similar assessments have been undertaken to support our previous Local Plans, where settlements are ranked from most to least sustainable. This has informed the development of a settlement hierarchy. It is our current intention that this new assessment will support a new settlement hierarchy.

## ROLE OF THE SETTLEMENT ASSESSMENT

- 1.5. Our aims in producing this study are to:
  - Provide an up-to-date picture of the services and infrastructure in settlements across the two districts;
  - Establish an evidence base, covering South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, that can assist in identifying service or facilities shortages which may help to justify contributions from any new developments; and



- Provide a hierarchy of settlements based upon the current level of provision of services and facilities, and the role that the settlement plays in the districts.
- 1.6. By providing these outputs, this assessment will help to inform the spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan 2041, influencing how any identified development needs in the Joint Local Plan are met across the districts.
  - 1.7. It is not the role of this study to ascertain the development capacity of each settlement or to provide a quantum of new development that each settlement should accommodate. The overall level of new development directed to settlements in the districts will be determined through the Joint Local Plan 2041, taking account of the settlement assessment and various other evidence studies as well as other policy documents such as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.
  - 1.8. This assessment will also be a useful data source for groups wishing to prepare or update a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

## 2. National Policy and Guidance

- 2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>1</sup> sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied, whilst Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>2</sup> provides supplementary guidance to these policies. We have set out below what we consider to be the most relevant sections to the settlement assessment methodology.

### NPPF

- 2.2. The NPPF sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, which it defines at a high level as "*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*". In addition, the NPPF highlights the UK's commitment to the UN's 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup>. Figure 1 one provides these goals.

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<sup>1</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021), Available from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1005759/NPPF\\_July\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

<sup>3</sup> Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Available from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Figure 1: UN Sustainable Development Goals



- 2.3. These goals should, wherever relevant, inform our understanding of sustainable development and how sustainable our settlements are.
- 2.4. The NPPF elaborates that achieving sustainable development means the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social, and environmental. These objectives are at the core of the settlement assessment methodology.
- 2.5. Paragraph 9 sets out that planning policies should play an “*active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area*”. For South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, which contain a mix of urban and rural areas with distinct character and identity as well as several opportunity areas, such as Science Vale, this means a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not appropriate. The Joint Local Plan’s strategy for the districts will need to take this into account.
- 2.6. Paragraph 79 relates to rural housing and states planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. This is relevant to South and Vale due to the predominantly rural nature of the districts. To identify these opportunities, we need a robust assessment of services, facilities and connectivity, both physical and digital, in the districts.

- 2.7. Regarding employment, the NPPF sets out that planning policies should: *“recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors”* as well as *“the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship”* (Paragraphs 83 and 84). To be able to address the locational requirements and the retention and development of local services and facilities, we need to understand where these are.
- 2.8. Paragraph 105 of the NPPF states *“Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, as well as improve air quality and public health.”* The settlement assessment should enable us to understand how accessible our settlements are by public transport and active modes of travel. It is worth noting that this assessment, like previous assessments, will be completed at a point in time and not a ‘live’ document repeatedly updated.

## PPG

- 2.9. Within the Government’s Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), the most relevant section relates to how planning policies can support sustainable rural communities. It states:
- “People living in rural areas can face particular challenges in terms of housing supply and affordability, while the location of new housing can also be important for the broader sustainability of rural communities. Strategic policies will need to be informed by an understanding of these needs and opportunities...”*
- 2.10. As well as:
- “The nature of rural housing needs can be reflected in the spatial strategy set out in relevant policies, including in the housing requirement figures for any designated rural areas. A wide range of settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas, so blanket policies restricting housing development in some types of settlement will need to be supported by robust evidence of their appropriateness.”*
- 2.11. This is relevant to South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse as they have significant rural areas which will need to be taken account of when developing the spatial strategy for the Joint Local Plan.

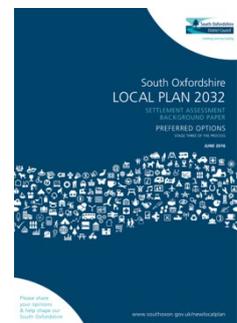
## OXFORDSHIRE PLAN 2050

- 2.12. The Oxfordshire Councils are working together to prepare the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The Oxfordshire Plan will set the strategic planning policies for Oxfordshire which the emerging Joint Local Plan will need to be in conformity with, assisting in delivering the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Plan. The Oxfordshire Plan will set the housing and employment land requirements for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, which will require a review of settlement capacity and will have some relevance to the main settlements in the districts.
- 2.13. The Oxfordshire Plan has so far undergone two rounds of statutory consultation and further consultation is planned. The latest consultation documents provided 5 spatial strategy options. The spatial strategy will influence how our settlements evolve, as it will influence the spatial distribution of strategic growth in the districts, including housing, infrastructure and associated services and facilities.

## 3. Our Previous Approach

### SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE

- 3.1. As part of the evidence base for the [South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035](#) (SOLP) the Council produced a Settlement Assessment Background Topic Paper 2018<sup>4</sup> to support the spatial strategy. This paper set out the settlement assessment methodology the Council undertook to support the SOLP. This methodology required a review of the methodology produced to support the [Core Strategy 2012](#), which was part of the previous Development Plan<sup>5</sup>, and then updated the information held for the settlements. The methodology focused on three main criteria:



- The levels of services and facilities on offer in each settlement;
- The proximity of each settlement to towns, larger villages, and employment centres; and
- Access to public transport.

- 3.2. This led to a score for each settlement that was applied against a benchmark for each settlement category, these categories were:

- Towns;

<sup>4</sup> South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 Settlement Assessment Background Paper 2018, available from [https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=1421403196&CODE=3187906E1C19C2DB8866C36DB9B4B380](https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=1421403196&CODE=3187906E1C19C2DB8866C36DB9B4B380)

<sup>5</sup> As defined by section 38 of the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)

- Larger Villages;
- Smaller Villages; and
- Other Villages.

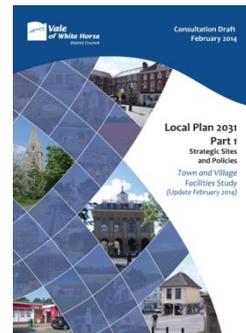
3.3. Settlements that did not score high enough to be considered under these categories did not feature in the settlement hierarchy. Figure 2 sets out the settlements as they are in the current South Oxfordshire settlement hierarchy.

3.4. The Council used a scoring system as the starting point for deciding which categories a settlement would fall into. Qualitative information provided by Parish Councils and Officer research formed part of the process to ensure local knowledge was considered. This ensured the level of scoring against each of the three main criteria was appropriate, before settling on the final decision for which category a settlement fell into.

3.5. The results of the assessment were determined by both a quantitative assessment of the services and facilities available in a settlement, its proximity to another settlement with services, and the level of public transport available.

## VALE OF WHITE HORSE

3.6. To support the production of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031, the Council produced a Town and Facilities Study 2014<sup>6</sup>. This study built on existing studies, updated via consultation with parish councils and desktop studies. A scoring system was then devised to rank the settlements, with the scoring being based on the relative importance of each settlement, its proximity to services, and connectivity. Whether a settlement was washed over by Green Belt, or inset from it, was also noted.



3.7. The settlement hierarchy produced resulted in 4 categories for settlements:

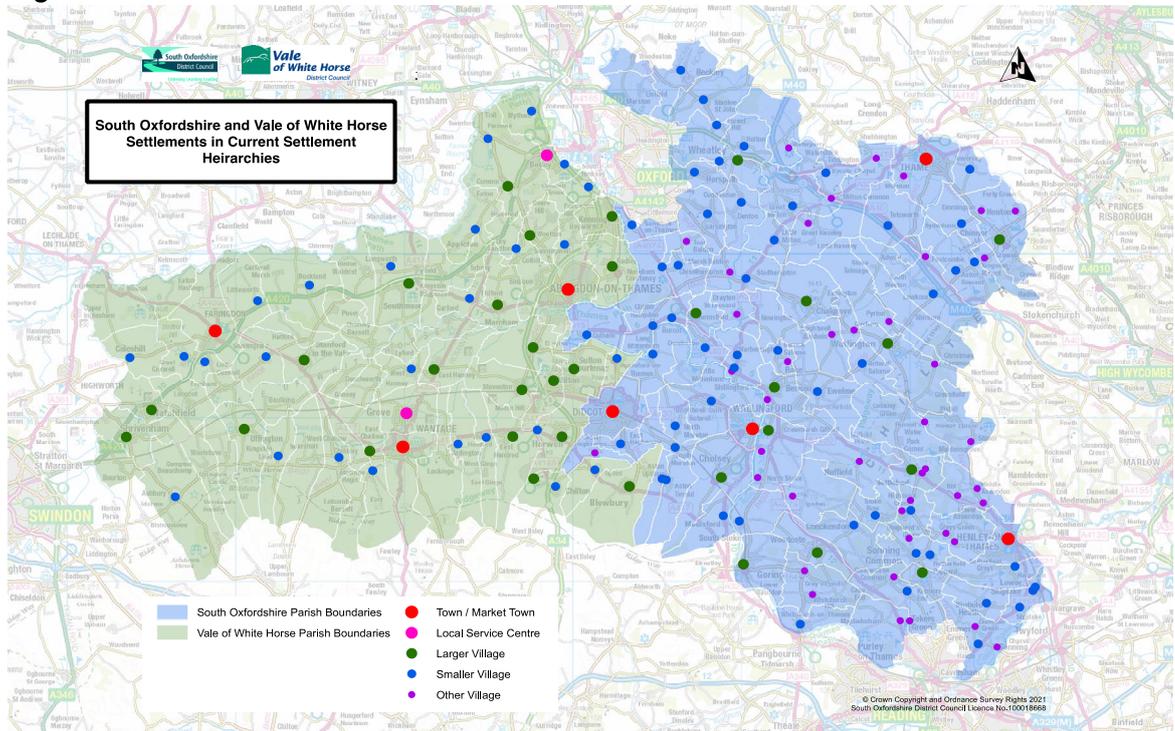
- Market Town;
- Local Service Centre;
- Larger Village; and
- Smaller Village.

3.8. Settlements that did not score high enough to be considered under these categories were classed as part of the open countryside. Figure 2 sets out these settlements as they are in the current Vale of White Horse settlement hierarchy.

<sup>6</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 Town and Facilities Study February 2014, available from [https://data.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=910616349&CODE=A872CE62744713B67530107E783AFEB4](https://data.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=910616349&CODE=A872CE62744713B67530107E783AFEB4)

- 3.9. The results of the Town and Facilities Study 2014 formed the settlement hierarchy, which then informed the spatial strategy.

Figure 2: Current Settlement Hierarchies



## 4. Methodology

- 4.1. The information collected to support the previous South Oxfordshire Settlement Assessment and Vale of White Horse Town and Villages Facility Study reports will be reviewed and updated, in the following stages:

### PROPOSED SETTLEMENT CATEGORIES

- 4.2. Currently South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse use differing settlement categories, with the Vale of White Horse having a settlement category by the name of 'Local Service Centre', and South Oxfordshire having a settlement category called 'Other Villages', which are not found in each other's hierarchies.
- 4.3. We are proposing to take a different approach by organising the settlement hierarchy into consistent numbered tiers. Settlements with the highest level of services and facilities will be the highest tier, whilst those with settlements assessed as having the lowest level of service and facilities available being classed as the lowest tier.

## STAGE 1

- 4.4. The first task will be to define the settlements that may form part of the resulting settlement hierarchy. The starting point for this will be the settlement lists produced as part of the previous settlement hierarchies. We will then look at updated population data from the 2021 Census to gain an initial view of changes to settlements over time, as well as whether there are any settlements that were not previously included in the settlement hierarchies that should be considered. It is important to recognise here that data is not available for population size for all settlements, for some areas the most specific data available will be at parish level. However, this will still be helpful as a starting point for further analysis to be undertaken.



- 4.5. As part of this we will undertake work to identify the spatial relationships of settlements within the districts, and where relevant, relationships to settlements outside the districts. In other words, this means identifying the geographical relationships between settlements.

## STAGE 2

- 4.6. Stage 2 of the assessment will score the settlements according to the level of services and facilities in the area.
- 4.7. The starting point for this will be a survey which will be distributed to all Town and Parish Councils, asking them to provide information on the services and facilities available in their areas. This is important, as the local knowledge that Town and Parish Councils have will be able to add nuance and detail to the assessment, picking up on areas that may not be easily identifiable from completing this task as desk-based research or site visits. It also provides these Town and Parish Councils with the opportunity to actively participate in the preparation of the Joint Local Plan, which will shape the development of the districts for years to come.
- 4.8. Table 1 sets out the services and facilities that are proposed to be looked at as part of the settlement assessments scoring. We have attributed a proposed score assigned for each item which is aimed at reflecting their importance in meeting local needs.

Table 1: Services and facilities indicators

Indicator	Score	Comment
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	2	Scored per facility
Secondary School	4	Scored per facility
Further Education	2	Scored per facility
Crèche / Nursery	1	Scored per facility
<b>Healthcare</b>		
Hospital	4	Scored per facility
GP Surgery	4	Scored per facility
Clinic	2	Scored per facility
Dentist	2	Scored per facility
<b>Shops</b>		
Local Shop	2	Scored per facility
Petrol Station with a shop	1	Scored per facility
Supermarket	4	Scored per facility
Retail	2	Scored per facility
<b>Hospitality</b>		
Restaurants, pubs, and cafes	2	Scored per facility
Takeaways	2	Scored per facility
<b>Financial services</b>		
Post office	2	Scored per facility
Bank / Building Society	2	Scored per facility
ATM	1	Scored per facility
<b>Community Services</b>		
Village / Community Hall	1	Scored per facility
Places of Worship	1	Scored per facility
Library- Permanent	2	Scored per facility
Leisure Centre	2	Scored per facility
Sport Club	1	Scored per facility
Entertainment facilities	1	Services such as cinema, bowling etc. This will be scored per facility
<b>Outside facilities / Open Space</b>		
Public Park / Garden	1	Scored per facility
Sports Pitch	1	Scored per facility
Multi Use Games Area	1	Scored per facility
Playground	1	Scored per facility
Allotments	1	Scored per facility

Indicator	Score	Comment
Public Open Space	1	Scored per facility. Public Open space includes all open space of public value that is publicly accessible. This can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors, and country parks. Areas that are considered Public Open Space but do not fall into categories above will be considered here.

### STAGE 3

- 4.9. Once data has been collected on the services and facilities available in settlements across the districts, the settlements will be provisionally ranked according to their score.
- 4.10. The next important step in the process will be looking at the proximity and connectivity of settlements to services in other settlements, including settlements outside the districts.
- 4.11. Table 2 sets out scoring that is based on the proximity and connectivity of a settlement to a key employment site, which will be applied in addition to the services and facilities scoring.

*Table 2: Proximity / Connectivity scoring to Key Employment Sites*

Proximity to Key Employment Sites <sup>7</sup>	Score	Comment
Walking	6	Based upon a key employment site being within a reasonable walking distance from settlement.
Cycling	5	Based upon a site being within a reasonable cycling distance from settlement.
Public Transport	4	Based upon a site being within a reasonable settlement using public transport.

<sup>7</sup> Settlements will be scored in according to their proximity to key employment sites they have access to. Proximity will be determined by recognised travel routes using online sources, such as Google Maps. There will be a validation process to ensure routes are safe for proposed travel method.

4.12. Table 3 sets the proposed scoring for settlements according to the level of public transport provision available.

*Table 3: Public Transport provision*

<b>Public Transport</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Bus Services	0-10	Scoring will depend on level of service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No service- 0</li> <li>• 1-5 per day- 1</li> <li>• 6+ per day (but less than 1 per hour)- 2</li> <li>• 1 per hour- 5</li> <li>• 2 per hour- 7</li> <li>• 3+ per hour- 10</li> </ul>
Rail Services	0-25	Scoring will depend on level of service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High frequency, with high speed service available- 25</li> <li>• Medium Frequency, on a mainline- 20</li> <li>• Low frequency, on a mainline- 15</li> <li>• Low frequency, not on a mainline- 10</li> </ul>

4.13. Table 4 sets out the proposed scoring to be attributed to settlements that are within a reasonable distance of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Settlements

*Table 4: Proximity to Tier 1 Settlements*

<b>Proximity to Tier 1 Settlements</b>	<b>Score</b>	Tier 1 settlements will receive maximum score
Walking	9	Based upon Tier 1 settlement being within a reasonable walking distance from settlement.
Cycling	8	Based upon Tier 1 settlement being within a reasonable cycling distance from settlement
Public Transport	7	Based upon Tier 1 settlement being within a reasonable distance of settlement using public transport.
<b>Proximity to Tier 2 settlements</b>		Tier 2 settlements will receive maximum score
Walking	3	Based upon Tier 2 settlement being within a reasonable

<b>Proximity to Tier 1 Settlements</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Tier 1 settlements will receive maximum score</b>
		walking distance from settlement.
Cycling	2	Based upon Tier 2 settlement being a reasonable cycling distance from settlement.
Public Transport	1	Based upon site being within a reasonable distance of settlement using public transport.

4.14. Table 5 sets out the proposed scoring to be attributed to settlements that are within a reasonable distance of major settlements located outside the district.

*Table 5: Proximity to major settlements outside of the districts*

<b>Proximity to major settlements outside the district</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Walking	9	Based on settlements within a reasonable distance to a major settlement outside the district by walking.
Cycling	8	Based on settlements within a reasonable distance to a major settlement outside the district by cycling.
Public Transport	7	Based on settlements within a reasonable distance to a major settlement outside the district by public transport.

4.15. Table 6 sets out scoring based upon the quality of broadband coverage that a settlement has. This will be determined by the level of ultrafast broadband coverage, with ultrafast broadband being connection speeds of 300mbps.

*Table 6: Broadband coverage quality*

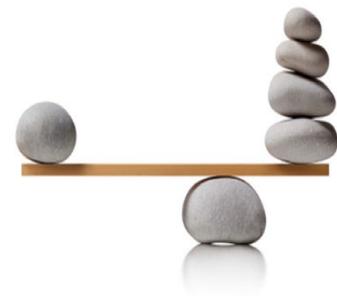
<b>Broadband coverage quality</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Ultra-fast broadband coverage 75% and higher	4	This data is accessible through Ofcom.
Ultra-fast broadband coverage between 50% and 74%	2	This data is accessible through Ofcom.
Ultra-fast broadband coverage between 25% and 49%	1	This data is accessible through Ofcom.

## STAGE 4

- 4.16. In addition to the quantitative analysis there will also be an element of qualitative analysis. The scoring system will be used as the starting point for deciding which category each settlement should be in, but the hierarchy is not based solely on a settlement's score. We recognise the difficulty of applying a solely quantifiable approach to assess a settlement's sustainability, taking into account local knowledge of an area. This narrative will be explained in the settlement assessment. When categorising a settlement in the hierarchy, a judgement will be made as to the settlement's sustainability.

### Balance Of Criteria

- 4.17. In addition to a settlement's score, we will also look at the balance between a settlement's access to services and facilities; proximity to places and employment; digital connectivity; and access to public transport. A judgment will be made as to a settlement's ranking in the hierarchy where it has scored highly against one criterion but very low against another, where there will be a greater emphasis placed on the need for a settlement to have some services of its own.



### Scale/Urban Form

- 4.18. We will also consider the scale and urban form of a settlement. Isolated groups of housing with no facilities that are not within walking distance (along a safe route) of a town or larger village with poor connectivity, are not likely to feature in the hierarchy as these are not appropriately sustainable places that would support new development.



Image produced by Jim Linwood, available from <https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/cea12cb6-73c6-434e-b4b7-c878c428f23b>

- 4.19. In addition, current planned growth may have a significant impact on the scale and urban form of a settlement which may need to be considered. This will be particularly relevant to settlements that have experienced significant growth in recent years or where significant growth is planned.

## Connectivity

- 4.20. The assessment will also seek to deal with the interconnectivity between smaller settlements and how groupings of settlements support each other by providing a range of facilities across the different locations. However, it may not be appropriate to rank each settlement the same, particularly when considering other factors such as the nature of the connection between settlements, as well as the scale and development pattern of each settlement.



Image produced by Fab738, available from <https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/0b48bc6c-17f8-4c27-b5a0-383d3df2592d/>

## **STAGE 5**

- 4.21. Stage 5 of the assessment will be a review of the data and information gathered and conclusions reached. This will entail the organisation of all the settlements into their appropriate tiers, based upon the assessment that has taken place.
- 4.22. This stage will also involve a sense check against the results of the previous settlement assessment to ensure that the categorisation is appropriate. The results of the settlement assessment will be consulted on publicly in future consultations on the emerging Joint Local Plan and its evidence base.

## **5. An Ongoing Process**

- 5.1. The Settlement Hierarchy and the methodology behind it will be an iterative process. It will be appropriately amended as service provision changes with time, as further research is completed, and relevant consultation comments are considered. Therefore, whilst this methodology document sets out the intended approach for the settlement assessment work, it may be updated when we come to publish the final document.

## 6. How To Comment

- 6.1. The settlement assessment work is about understanding how our settlements are meeting your everyday needs. Therefore, we believe it is important to engage with our residents from the outset. We're aware that lifestyles are changing and what might have been essential for everyday living in the past might not be now. Also, there may be new things that are important, we'd like to hear your thoughts on this. We welcome comments on any part of the proposed methodology and in particular in response to the questions below.

### Questions for you on the Settlement Assessment Methodology

1. Are there any services or facilities missing from the list of services and facilities proposed to be assessed?
2. Do you consider that any services or facilities should be removed from the assessment?
3. Looking at the proposed scoring identified in tables 1 to 6 do you consider that the scoring reflects the weight/importance of each service or facility?
4. What do you consider to be a reasonable distance to walk, cycle or use public transport to access key employment sites or to access services and facilities?

- 6.2. We are inviting comments on this document between 12 May and 23 June 2022. You can provide comments by using the survey form on either of our websites:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/jointlocalplan>

<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/jointlocalplan>

- 6.3. You can find further information and other consultation documents on the above website addresses.
- 6.4. Please contact us on 01235 422425 or email [haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk) for support to access the consultation materials.



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